Consciousness and Action among Auto Workers in India: The Maruti Movement, 2007-2017

Charvaak Pati

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the dialectical relation between class consciousness and collective action among auto workers in India. Specifically, it examines how the existing state of class consciousness shapes and, in turn, is shaped by class struggle in the context of the militant working class struggle in Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL), India's largest carmaker. This dialectic of consciousness and action among the Maruti workers is shaped by workers' working and living conditions, their own political organisations, and interventions by the institutions of the state. There are distinctive political barriers to class consciousness and class struggle such as caste, ethnicity and regional identities. Yet, there are objective economic and political conditions such as low wages and denial of trade union rights which have the potential to weaken these political barriers without undermining the importance of these identities for the working class. This dissertation argues that in the absence of political organisation/s imbued with a political consciousness that underscores the centrality of capitalism and the capitalist state and the limits (both material and discursive) they put on working class struggle and consciousness, it is not possible to scale up place-specific and plant-based militant trade union struggles.

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List of Acronyms

AITUC All Indian Trade Union Congress

AMP Automotive Mission Plan

Assocham Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India

BMD Bigul Mazdoor Dasta

BMS Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh

CITU Centre of Indian Trade Unions

CLARA Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act

DMIC Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor

FEMA Foreign Exchange Regulation Act

FICCI Federations of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry

FMS Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar

GCU Good Conduct Undertaking

HMS Hind Mazdoor Sangh

HSIIDC Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Cooperation

IMT Industrial Model Town

ISI Import Substitution Industrialisation

MRTP Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act

MSIL Maruti Suzuki India Limited

MSWU Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union

MUEU Maruti Udyog Employee's Union

MUL Maruti Udyog Limited

NCR National Capital Region

NIMZ National Investment and Manufacturing Zones

NMP National Manufacturing Policy

NTUI National Trade Union Initiative

PLIS Production Linked Incentive Scheme

SEZ Special Economic Zone

SIAM Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers

SMC Suzuki Motor Corporation

TELCO Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company

VRS Voluntary Retirement Scheme

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The automobile industry has been at the centre of militant working-class struggles in the twentieth century. In her book, *Forces of Labour,* Beverly Silver (2003) presents a magisterial account of working-class movements in the world in the twentieth century by drawing attention to the shifts in the spaces of struggle from North America and Western European countries to the countries of global South such as South Korea, Brazil and South Africa. She contends that workers' struggles in the automobile industry have replaced militant working-class struggles in the textile industries in the nineteenth century. Silver's observations can be extended to China and India, which have witnessed militant struggles in the auto industry (Barnes, 2018; Friedman, 2014; Friedman and Li, 2016; Lee, 2007; Ness, 2016; Zhang, 2008). The working class struggles in the Indian auto industry have led to conversations on renewal of labour movement in India. According to an Indian newspaper, *The Economic Times*, the auto industry has been at the centre of labour agitation in India between 2005 and 2015, spread out across different geographical locations (Chatterjee, 2016). This trend has become more pronounced in the automobile region of Delhi and its surrounding areas. A *Forbes* magazine's report, entitled '*India's Labour Pains'*, stated that violation of constitutional rights of workers has created a volatile situation in the Indian automobile industry (Standards, 2011). A workers' newspaper published out of Faridabad (Haryana), *Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar (Faridabad Workers' Newspaper,* or, FMS) notes that workers' struggle in the auto plants is an everyday event which has only increased manifold in the last decade in the industrial landscape around Delhi. Similar reports of strikes and violent conflicts in the southern Indian automobile industry have been carried by online

news portal such as *tnlabour.* Academic scholarship on the conflicts has emerged in the recent years (Barnes, 2018; Ness, 2016; Nowak, 2016a, 2016b; Shyam Sundar, 2012).

As mentioned, the automobile belt in Gurgaon-Manesar has been known for massive workers' struggles. Most notable among them were the strikes at Honda Motorcycle and Scooter in India (HMSI) in 2005, strike and death of a worker at Rico Auto Industries (RAI) in 2009, Autofit Ltd. in 2012, and Munjal Kiriu in 2013, among others. The most spectacular struggle was waged by the workers of Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL)'s Manesar plant. The struggles by the Maruti workers were considered the most militant of industrial workers' struggle after the famous and longest running strike in India, the Bombay textile strikes in the early years of 1980s (Ness 2016; Nowak 2016a; for Bombay textile strikes, see van Wersch, 1992; Pathy,1998). The protracted struggles at the Manesar plant involved factory occupations, strikes, lock-outs, violence in the factory, followed by mass dismissals and brutal state repression. The year-long strikes at the Manesar plant in 2011 led to conversations on the *return* of conflict in India's industrial relation after decades of disquiet, mainly driven by precarious and contractualisation of work, increasing work intensity on the shop floors, and denial of basic trade union rights.

The empirical context of the dissertation is the automobile belt in Gurgaon-Manesar in the province of Haryana **(see Map 1),** which has witnessed several massive strikes and unprecedented workers' struggles in the last two decades. It is in the context of these struggles that this dissertation aims to examine the dialectic of class consciousness and class struggle among the Maruti workers. In this chapter I elaborate on the geographical context followed by outlining the aims and objectives of the dissertation. Then I briefly examine the literature on class consciousness and class struggle as well as the existing literature on the Maruti struggles. Studying class consciousness in a concrete context poses a number of methodological challenges. I discuss these challenges and discuss my predicaments of doing

fieldwork in the auto landscape of India. In the final section, I outline the organisation of the dissertation, the specific questions each chapter addresses, and the central theme that runs through all the fieldwork-based empirical chapters.

Map 1: Province of Haryana

1.2 The Geographical Context

The MSIL was previously known as Maruti Udyog Ltd (MUL). It was established in Gurgaon in 1981 as a public sector undertaking by an Act of Parliament followed by an agreement with Suzuki Motors Corporation (SMC) for technical collaboration. The Government of India had 74 per cent stakes while SMC had 26 per cent stakes in the MUL. The company was first operationalised in 1983 with the rolling out of the popular Maruti 800 model from its Gurgaon plant. By 1992 SMC had increased its stakes in the MUL to 50 per cent and became an equal partner in the joint venture. In 2002, the SMC had increased its share to 54.2 per cent. The process of disinvestment continued and by June 2003, the government's share had reduced to 18.28 per cent and further down to less than 11 per cent by 2006. By the end of 2007, the Government of India had given up its stake in the company completely, making it a purely private company. The increase in the stake by the SMC reflected a broader trend in the Indian economy after the economic reforms that allowed increasing inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the manufacturing sector (Chakraborty and Nunnenkamp, 2008). The Maruti Udyog Ltd was renamed as Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) in September 2007 (Bhargava & Seetha, 2010; D' Costa, 2005; PUDR, 2001). MSIL's two plants, in Gurgaon and Manesar are located in Haryana. SMC opened a new plant in Hansalpur, Gujarat which became operational in February 2017. MSIL occupies over 47 per cent of the market share in the passenger car segment in India. The production capacity of MSIL stands at roughly 1.5 million units per year. MSIL produces models such as Swift Dzire, Ertiga, Wagon R, Alto, Swift, Omni, Baleno and Baleno RS, among others.

MSIl has had a history of anti-union activities when its Gurgaon plant-based union was de-recognised because of three-months strike over incentives in 2000-01. The management imposed a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) on the workers and over 2000

workers out of the 4000-strong work-force were forced to accept VRS. This resulted in a major restructuring of the workforce with introducing higher number of contract labour in the Gurgaon plant. The Manesar plant is located in a new industrial area called Industrial Model Town (IMT) Manesar. The plant began its operations in 2006-07 with over 1000 workers. The strength of the workforce increased as production was ramped up, and by 2011, the plant had over 3,000 workers. There were no permanent workers at the plant till 2009, with the workforce comprised trainees, contract workers; the casual workers were hired based on weekly production requirements. Over 1,000 workers were made permanent between 2009 and 2010, but the rest of the workforce remained contractual and casual. There was no union in the plant. Workers demanded a union in order to deal with grievances arising out of increasing work intensity, low wages and everyday humiliation on the shop floor, and miserable living conditions.[1] The management refused to accept the demand of the workers and clamped down on those workers who were at the forefront of union formation. The workers resorted to wildcat strikes amidst solidarity among contract and permanent workers as well as workers from other plants in Manesar and Gurgaon. This solidarity was not a common sight in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial landscape. Strikes in this region had usually been confined to the factory gates, and rarely "jumped scale," to regional or national strikes to use an expression by Smith (1992). In addition, these strikes were spontaneous, organised by workers on their own. After a protracted struggle of several months, the management finally recognised the union in March 2012.

The struggle of the Maruti workers, however, did not end with the formation of a union. Solidarity between the permanent and contract workers was key to the struggles and the formation of the union. In its first Demand Charter, the union gave equal priority to contract workers' demands. Even as the negotiations dragged on, large-scale violence erupted

[1] The timeline of the Manesar workers' struggle is provided in Appendix 2.

in the plant on July 18, 2012, leading to the death of a senior management official and destruction of machinery and cars in the assembly. A part of the plant was also set on fire. The management used this incident to alter the balance of forces in the plant and deal with an assertive union as well as the rank-and-file. Hundreds of workers including the union executive were arrested and services of more than 2,000 workers were terminated. In addition, the imprisoned workers were denied a fair trial and were subjected to frequent torture and beatings (Venkat et al, 2019). The terminated workers, however, did not give in before the management and the state, and began a movement to free the jailed workers supported by various smaller labour organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs) in Haryana.

The court cases continued for five years, and in a verdict on March 10, 2017, the Gurgaon Sessions Court[2] acquitted 117 workers and convicted 31 workers, including the entire union executive, in the case related to the violent incident on July 18, 2012. The union members were sentenced to life imprisonment, four workers were given five years of rigorous imprisonment and the remaining 14 workers were let off with what they had already served (Behl, 2017). The trial was concluded after approximately five years of struggle with the justice system in India. The militant struggles at the Manesar plant, which had provided a glimmer of hope for revitalising the working-class movement in the automobile region gradually declined. The verdict of the sessions court elicited only symbolic protest by Manesar workers and the major Central Trade Unions (CTUs) in the region. The dismissed workers never got their work back. The violent incident and the verdicts that followed were used by the MSIL management and the institutions of the state to further consolidate their grip over workers.

[2] A sessions court is the highest criminal court in a district which acts as the court of first instance for the trial of serious criminal offences.

The Maruti movement has attracted the attention of academics and labour activists in equal measure. The academic scholarship examined the movement by looking at its institutional character (or lack thereof) and how the movement took a unique form other than a typical trade union struggle (reliance on legal means, authorised strikes, politics of compromise) in the automobile industry (Sehgal, 2012; Sen 2016; Ness 2016, Nowak 2020). Labour activists and workers' newspapers (Radical Notes, FMS, Bigul Mazdoor) examined the movement from the perspective of workers' spontaneity and autonomy, gleaned through wildcat strikes, and independence from central trade unions in different phases of the movement. These reflections have made important contributions to understanding the movement, the actors involved, its institutional character and the spontaneous element that constituted the movement. However, some gaps remain. First, there is a lack of emphasis on how the movement was constituted in the initial stages when workers demanded a separate union. Second, the existing literature ignores how workers' consciousness impacted the nature of the struggle (strikes) and in what ways this consciousness was influenced by several exogenous factors. Third, there is little discussion on why the movement took a specific form after the violent incident on July 18, 2012. In short, the existing literature treats the movement as an undifferentiated phenomenon and undermines the specific forms it took in different phases.

The different phases of Maruti workers' struggle constitute what I will call the Maruti movement. This is a description used by the workers involved in the movement and as well as by the wider working-class, trade unions and labour organisers in the automobile industry in the Gurgaon and Manesar. I identify three phases in the movement: In the first phase, the workers came together to form a union in response to the working and living conditions; in the second phases, workers struck three times to demand recognition of their union; in the third phase, the workers' struggle moved out of the factory gates to the rural landscape in Haryana. Why did the movement take the shape it did in these three different phases and

which factor(s) determined the political response of workers, and consequently, the nature of the movement?

1.3 Aim and Objectives

It is my contention in this dissertation that the question of why the movement took specific forms in different phases needs to be examined from the vantage point of class consciousness. Therefore, the problematic for this research is: how class consciousness of Maruti workers has shaped—and has been shaped by—their class struggle in the automobile landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar, including its spatial linkages with the rural hinterland, and how the relation between consciousness and struggle has itself been shaped by workers' material conditions?

The main objective as posed above has led me to examine its various parts and sub-parts.

Objective 1. To examine the broader (post-colonial) political-economic context of the Maruti strikes?

1.1 What is the nature of the historical development and spatial distribution of the auto industry in post-colonial India, and what role has the state played in the creation of the auto belt?

1.2 How has the development of the industry created precarious employment conditions including the denial of basic trade union rights, and how have the workers responded to these conditions and denial of rights?

Objective 2. To detail how class consciousness shaped the nature of class struggle of Maruti workers in the Manesar plant.

2.1 How did the lessons from past struggle (the three-month's strike at the Gurgaon plant), current struggles (strikes and unionisation in other plants), and trade union ideology, in conjunction with workers' working and living conditions, influence consciousness of workers?

2.2. How did a 13-day wildcat strike impact the consciousness of workers, and consequently determined the class struggle in the Manesar plant?

2.3. What role did trade union politics in the region, state intervention, and spatial solidarity play in shaping class consciousness and class struggle in the Manesar plant?

Objective 3. To understand how state coercion, plant-level restructuring, and spatial shift of class struggle affect the consciousness of workers in the backdrop of a violent incident in the Manesar plant.

3.1 How did the violent incident disrupt the emerging solidarity between permanent and contract workers in the plant?

3.2 In what ways did state intervention and management strategies to weaken the solidarity among workers affect the consciousness and struggle of workers?

3.3 How did the changing dynamics of workers' politics inside the plant and a struggle waged outside the plant created contradictory effects on Maruti workers' consciousness and action?

1.4 Methodological and theoretical considerations on class consciousness

As already indicated, central to my study of workers' struggles is the matter of workers' consciousness: how does workers' consciousness impact and is impacted by class struggle? In other words, the empirical topic at hand (i.e., the Maruti strikes) raises a broad question concerning consciousness. There are broadly two approaches to the (empirical) study of class consciousness. The first approach examines individual opinions, attitudes, and belief systems as expressed in survey research. The second approach has taken a historical and ethnographic character. The first approach has been championed by sociologists (Goldthorpe, et al, 1967; Wright, 2000) who look at class consciousness as workers' conceptions, images, attitudes, and ideational and verbal responses to the social arrangements in which they find themselves.

A survey is carried out to measure workers' attitudes on a number of issues related to class identification, work satisfaction and dissatisfaction, class animosities, and political preferences. These attitudes are then correlated with any number of independent variables, such as skill level, racial or ethnic identification, religion, age, sex and so forth. Sociologists utilise this data to assess the degree of "class consciousness" in a given population of workers (Fantasia 1988, pp. 4-5). An analysis of consciousness based on survey research assumes that individuals' views are fixed and static. In fact, this mode of analysis ends up de-historicising and de-spatialising workers' consciousness as it fails to take into account the potential for the transformation in the consciousness of workers due to a variety of reasons such as strikes, revolutionary upheavals, or a financial crisis. More importantly, the adoption of a survey method to study class consciousness ignores the contradictory and fluid nature of consciousness. This contradictory or dual nature of consciousness was hinted at by Blackburn and Mann (1975, pp, 155-6) in their study of British workers. They found that workers were confused between conservatism and proletarianism, and that survey research does not account for the oscillations and paradoxes of workers' consciousness. In addition, the survey research also sidesteps the role of collective actions in shaping consciousness. Questioning the validity of survey research in understanding class consciousness, Marshall (1983, pp, 272-273) argues that an overemphasis on class imagery at the expense of class action neglects the fact that consciousness is generated in, and changed by, social action.

Survey research has largely been influenced by methodological individualism, which asserts that an analysis of individual beliefs and actions can explain societal processes. Methodological individualism draws its inspiration from the theoretical tenets of analytical Marxism which argues that individuals are rational utility maximisers, and that any action individuals undertake is underpinned by rational analysis of risks and benefits (Elster 1982; Roemer, 1982; Wright, 1997). McCall (2008) finds such arguments incapable of explaining

collective action. In his study of workers at Caterpillar Inc., McCall argues that the argument that collective action must be defined as "rational utility maximisers" is fundamentally untrue. From this perspective, "taking part in a strike would be considered irrational when workers repeatedly, at significant risk to their individual material well-being, make stands in favour of solidarity" (Mccall 2008, p, 147). Instead, Mccall argues for a Marxist approach which considers the structure of social relations in which individual responses, choices, and intentions are embedded (Mccall 2008, pp, 149-151).

The second approach examines class consciousness through historical and ethnographic lenses.[3] This approach has been pioneered by historians in the context of English workers (Foster, 1979; Hobsbawm, 1959, 1971; Thompson 1963, 1974) and workers and peasants during the French Revolution (Rude, 1981). In colonial India, a historical approach was adopted to study peasant's consciousness (Guha, 1983) and workers' consciousness (Chakrabarty, 1989; Chandavarkar, 1994). What is common to these studies is the study of consciousness as it unfolded over time and space. The shifts, contradictions, and transformation of consciousness in these studies are treated not as static phenomena, but as a part of ever evolving historical processes. These studies have used biographies, oral history, archival materials, and newspaper reports in order to analyse class consciousness.

An ethnographic approach to study class consciousness has been undertaken to grasp the nature of consciousness of workers in a limited time frame and within a specific social space. This method draws its inspiration from a historical approach by studying the shifts in consciousness; however, it also adds an ethnographic account of the quotidian and the mundane aspects of everyday life to arrive at an understanding of consciousness. Burawoy's

[3] This is not to argue that no distinctions exist between these varied historical and ethnographic studies on class consciousness. My purpose here is to understand how historians and ethnographers study class consciousness, and in what ways it differs from those of the methods adopted by survey approach. It must also be pointed out that I do not necessarily agree with the conclusions drawn by these studies on class consciousness. This subject matter requires a separate treatment which will not be undertaken in this research.

(1984) classic work on consciousness of American and Hungarian workers fall into this category. This approach brings into analysis the impact of ideology generated at the point of production during labour process on the consciousness of workers. Paul Willis' (1983) research on youth counter culture is a work in this tradition. Willis looks at how the counter-culture of black youth in a town ends up only in reproducing their own subordination to the dominant ideology. A combination of ethnography participant and archival work is used by Fantasia (1988) to understand what he calls "cultures of solidarity" among workers. A classic study of ethnographic approach to study consciousness has been undertaken by Scott (1985) in his study of peasants in a Malaysian village. Scott's ethnographic account sheds important lights on the nature of consciousness in everyday lives of peasants as they interact with the dominant ideology of their society. These approaches have empirically studied class consciousness not as a static element, but as an ever-changing dynamic that is influenced by events such as strikes. However, they do not pay enough attention to the objective material conditions and explanatory power to explain the contradictory forms class consciousness takes. A Marxist approach remedies this lacuna by establishing a dialectical linkage between material conditions and consciousness. In this study, I have relied both on approaches adopted by historians and ethnographers to study class consciousness and Marxist approaches to study consciousness by paying attention to material conditions of working class.

Marx and the revolutionary political and theoretical tradition that followed him considered class consciousness essential to radical social transformation and transcending capitalism. This tradition recognised the working class as the central agent of change in society but added that any radical change is possible when the agent of change is class conscious. Marx writes famously in the *Poverty of Philosophy* that revolutionary transformation is possible only when the working class transitions from class-in-itself to class-for-itself. In other words, the economic conditions generated by capitalism have created

a working class (class-in-itself), but transcendence of these conditions requires a consciousness of those economic conditions (class-for-itself) when workers become united against capital. Elaborating further, Marx and Engels write in the *Holy Family* that the working class becomes class conscious when it acts not in response to aims in a specific time or place, but acts in response to its objective situation in history. Drawing on Marx, Lukacs says that class consciousness is not about thoughts and feelings of workers in a particular situation, but thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation. Lukacs writes, "class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions imputed in a particular typical place in the process of production." (Lukacs, 2016, p. 52). While Marx (and Engels) and Lukacs highlight the significance of awareness of objective conditions for the emergence of a class-conscious working class, Lenin adds more complexity to the concept of class consciousness by discussing different kinds of consciousness and grounding them empirically in the concrete context of Czarist Russia. In his classic work *What is to be Done?,* Lenin (1902) makes a distinction between trade union consciousness and class consciousness proper. While the former is generated in the sphere of production, the latter is brought from 'outside', i.e., outside of the sphere of production, which Lenin refers to as class political consciousness or class consciousness proper. And, the working class achieves class consciousness through its fights against 'all cases of tyranny' against capitalism and the (autocratic) state and does not confine itself to economic struggles alone. Furthermore, class consciousness is brought to workers by a revolutionary working class political party imbued with Marxist theory, which sees the contradiction between capital and labour in capitalism as irreconcilable. Class consciousness proper – as opposed to trade union consciousness – consists precisely in the awareness of such irreconcilability.

Taking the analysis of class consciousness further, Italian Marxist Gramsci (1971) highlights the difference between common sense or uncritical consciousness and a

consciousness which is critical and conscious where workers take active part in creating history and choose one's own sphere of activity (pp.323-324). The common sense of the working class (subaltern groups) is disjointed, fragmented and incoherent, but with the aid of systematic philosophy (read Marxism) the fragmented and disjointed consciousness "can be made ideologically coherent" (p. 421).

There is no dearth of discussion on the relation between class consciousness and collective action in the form of strikes. (Hyman, 1972; Kelly, 1988; Moody & Cohen, 1998). Richard Hyman, a longtime observer of strikes in England, considered strikes as rational assertion of resistance to capitalism but insisted that strikes had limited impact on consciousness because of their inability to transcend narrow sectional interests, either in the shop floor or in a particular industry (Hyman, 1972, 1974). He did not believe that strikes had the potential to create "an explosion of consciousness" (Hyman, 1974, p. 126). In a study of glassworkers in England, Lane and Roberts (1970) argued that strikes led to militancy in a minority of workers, while the views of the opinions and attitudes of majority of workers did not change. This position forms part of a broader academic literature that considered strikes playing a marginal role in raising working class consciousness (Allen, 1981; Batstone, 1977; Mann, 1971). This view has, however, been contested by scholars who argue that strikes play an important role in making workers more militant (Beynon, 1985; Hartley,1983). Presenting a more optimistic picture in an analysis of strikes in the Britain and the USA, Moody and Cohen (1998) term strikes as 'opening up an epistemological break in working class consciousness' (p. 113).

In the Indian context, class consciousness has been examined in terms of its ability or inability to transcend other non-class identities, such as caste, religion and ethnicity. Marxist historians (Bhattacharya, 1981; Joshi, 2003; Sen, 1977) argued that with increasing industrialization and concentration of large number of workers in one place, class

consciousness will override consciousness based on other social identities. Drawing on theoretical insights from Lenin and the history of working class struggles in colonial India, these historians asserted that Communist parties and trade unions played a significant role in raising the class consciousness of workers in the textile industry by putting up a common front cutting across caste-based sectional interests. Isaac (1988) made a similar argument that class struggle of coir workers in Kerala helped them overcome caste conflicts in the industry because of outside intervention (by Congress Socialist Party). The Subaltern School of historiography has contested the view that workers can achieve class consciousness and overcome consciousness based on other social identities through external intervention (trade unions, political parties) and. For instance, Chakravarty (1988, 1989) argued that capitalist production is experienced differently by workers embedded in multiple non-class identities and this experience or what he calls 'culture' impacts class consciousness of workers. Furthermore, he argued that even when a strike occurred (in the textile industry), it was an expression of religious or caste-based discontent rather than a class-based expression of resistance against exploitation and domination in the industry. This view is contested by a number of historians (Bagchi,1990; Chandavarkar, 1994, 1997; Nair, 1993) who argue that Chakrabarty assumes an unchanging view of Indian society and ignores changes brought in by colonialism and capitalist production. While historians discussed the importance of class consciousness extensively, contemporary scholarship on class consciousness remains scarce barring a few exceptions. For instance, Patel (1994) states that active participation in strikes and the ideology of trade union organisers and not strikes per se play a critical role in raising the class consciousness of workers. In the famous Bombay textile strikes of 1982-3, van Wersch (1992) makes the case that the solidarity among workers never transgressed the borders of their own group. The unity among workers during the strike period was not due to

class consciousness, but a result of militant unions[4] fighting to increase their influence among workers. Drawing on several years of ethnographic research among steel workers in Bhilai Steel Plant (Chhattisgarh), Parry (2020) shows that class consciousness becomes predominant during a conflict situation with the management or company, but in a non-conflict situation other social identity such as caste and ethnicity override class consciousness.

There are three broad limitations to the existing research on class consciousness. The revolutionary Marxist tradition distinguished between two forms of consciousness: a consciousness in a specific place and time where the working class is aware of its immediate tasks, and a consciousness where the working class is aware of its objective conditions in history and the contradictions of capitalism as a whole. What is absent in this analysis is the contradictory forms class consciousness takes and its impact on class struggle. Furthermore, the non-linearity of class consciousness and the factors responsible for this remain underexamined in the Marxist tradition. There is nothing inevitable about the growth of class consciousness and the outcome of class struggle is contingent on structural constrains and human agency (Das, 2022). While strikes have been considered a significant factor in raising class consciousness, the form of consciousness that informs the decision of the working class to engage in strike action has not received adequate attention. Moreover, the stage of consciousness in a post-strike situation is seldom examined in the literature on class consciousness. An understanding of class consciousness in a post-strike situation is important in order to grasp the mechanisms which inhibits a progressive movement of class consciousness.

The literature on class consciousness in the Indian context is predominantly focused on the interaction between class consciousness and other social identities such as caste,

[4] The textile industry in Bombay had multiple unions affiliated with different political parties vying for expanding their turf and influence workers' choices.

religion and other community-based social ties. The contentious interaction of the working class with capital and the state and its various institutions, the reformist role of the trade unions, the changing dynamics of the labour markets with increasing precarity of a majority of the working class, and their collective and contradictory impact on the class consciousness of workers have received much less attention. Moreover, an analysis of the complex ways in which the working class draws on class consciousness as well as other community-based identities during class struggles remain largely absent in the Indian context.

In this dissertation, I use class consciousness in a Marxist framework to examine the Maruti movement, and derive several general conclusions about class struggle in the auto industry as well as broader working-class struggle in India. Marx argues that the working-class acquires class consciousness only when it becomes subjectively aware of its objective position in capitalism. This awareness of the objective conditions, however, is not automatic. The working class in a place may suffer a lot, but it may not be automatically (and fully) aware of the causes of its suffering and of what it can do about this. The awareness of the objective conditions is a contingent matter. It is mediated by a number of factors. They include: organisations (revolutionary and reformist), ideology (bourgeoise and working-class), and the self-activity of the working-class driven by its own theoretical reflections. In short, class consciousness of the working-class in not unilinear, but moves in a dialectical fashion. The different kinds of consciousness that develop over time in a place have been described as “stadiality” of consciousness by Das (2017, pp. 428-431). I aim to grasp this dialectical movement of class consciousness through an examination of the Maruti movement, and draw general implications for working class struggles in India and beyond.

1.5 Research Design and Data Collection

Recognising one's positionality is a critical factor in conducting research among social actors embedded in specific places. My own positionality as an upper-caste male, educated in a Canadian university and studying working class collective action in India begs a question whether my knowledge as an outsider, and the conclusions I will draw in my study would do justice to the workers who are engaged in those actions. Would my moral position as an 'outsider' prevent me from accessing the knowledge that the Maruti workers generated during their struggles? This leads us to the question of 'situated knowledge.' Following Harvey (1996, p.354), I distance myself from a concept of 'situated knowledge' that solely relies on individual biographies and the particularities of my life history.

An entry point into research field inevitably involves giving importance to some matters more than others. Ollman (2003) call this a vantage point which sets up a perspective that colours everything that falls into it (pp.99-100). My vantage point is drawn from a dialectical perspective rooted in historical materialism which allows me to look into a field from a theoretical perspective regardless of my own positionality. This perspective also allows me to maintain a critical distance expected of a researcher while acknowledging an empathy for the working class lives and struggles. This leads to what Rose (1997) calls reflexivity that avoids making any claims of producing supposedly neutral knowledge.

As mentioned before, a study of class consciousness based on survey research is premised on the theoretical perspective of methodological individualism that treats consciousness as static and fixed. Moreover, this method of studying consciousness quantifies consciousness based on their responses and preferences while ignoring the contradictory trends and fluidities seen in class consciousness due to a variety of factors such as strikes, state repression, and political organising. I avoided the pitfalls of this framework

by capturing workers' opinions in different phases and the transformation of those opinions during changes in material and ideological transformations and challenges. My questions were semi-structured. I paid attention to the place of interviews and workers' response to questions that required answers critical of their own actions. Changes in class consciousness is not simply a matter of opinions and preferences but also reflects in class struggle (which is contingent on a number of other factors). I sought to capture this reflection in my analysis of interviews in sync with the strikes and other forms of collective action that took place in Manesar and Gurgaon. The sole purpose was to understand the oscillations and paradoxes in workers' consciousness to get at a broader picture of class consciousness.

Interviewing is a complex social interaction that requires a high level of interpersonal skills by the researcher so that the respondent will feel at ease. The goal of the interview is to deeply explore a respondent's point of view, feelings, and perspectives in a space and time. This allows the researcher to have discussions with respondents that explain issues and complexities and to produce rich and varied data (Kitchin & Tate, 2013; Valentine, 2005). With this vantage point, I prepared a set of questions for different categories of interviewees. My interviewees included MSIL's Gurgaon and Manesar workers, unions and workers who took part in the Manesar workers' struggles, the Central Trade Union (CTU) leaders, labour lawyers, labour activists and civil society representatives. I conducted semi-structured interviews with my respondents. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is that partly, there is an order to it; the questions are definite and precise. Some questions are more open-ended in nature, allowing for flow in conversation and digressions, which opens up new avenues of inquiry that the researcher had not originally considered (Angrosino 2007, p. 42). With less formal, less standardized and more interactive interviews, I learned from my respondents and understood their perspectives on what transpired in different phases of the strikes and the movement in general.

My respondents were not forced into an artificial one-way mode of communication. The semi-structured research design became a precondition of meaningful communications as I improvised my questions as the interviews went along. Such interviews helped me adapt to the new ideas that emerged in course of the interviews and tailor more questions directly relevant to the respondent's work. For instance, when interviewing the workers who had been in prison, I was extra-sensitive and never insisted on a response when they turned quiet on what happened on 18 July 2012, when violence broke out in the Manesar plant. Some workers were reluctant to talk about their participation in the strikes, and in those situations, I turned the conversation to a more general nature like the life in the neighbourhoods, the personal background and what do they wanted to do in the future. Such conversations generated a lot of data that I did not require, but it offered a glimpse into workers' lives that would not have been accessible otherwise. Although I was well acquainted with the subject matter, as a researcher I preferred to cultivate naiveté (Angrosino 2007, p.57). I made it a point to ask questions that were obvious or were taken for granted. My experience of interviewing rank-and-file workers and union leaders was different. The interaction with common workers filled me with a strange sense of guilt as I felt at times that all that I was doing was taking their knowledge of class struggle away for my own academic ends. This feeling of discomfort and moral ambiguity did not stay with me when I was talking to labour lawyers, activists, union leaders, and those who were not living the everyday struggles of a working class life.

While interviewing, I ran into a problem of "true" articulation of one's opinions and views. The epistemological premise of interviewing (i.e., that respondents are competent reporters of past and present events, experiences, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, relationships, interactions, and so on), has been contested (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992). Respondents are influenced in many ways that affect how they interpret and account for events and

experiences to a researcher. Respondents may have cultural or strategic reasons for presenting information about themselves and others in a particular light, and may leave out or distort some information (Weiss, 1994). In order to avoid falling into the trap of pure subjectivism and distorted version of reality, I always resorted to comparing the information between different respondents, read the response in comparison with the documents like pamphlets and reports which had been produced and most importantly, compared the subjective responses with objective realities. This enabled me to minimise biases while interpreting fieldwork materials.

Observation has a key role to play in social research. Our ability to observe the world around us forms the basis for our ability to make common sense judgements about things (Angrosino 2007, p. 53). Observation begins the moment the researcher enters the field setting, and strives to set aside all preconceptions and take nothing for granted. As a result, the process of observation begins by taking everything in and recording in as much detail as possible, with as little interpretation as possible (Angrosino 2007, p.38). While waiting for workers in their neighbourhoods, I noted down my observations of the spatial location of the interview and the verbal and non-verbal response of workers. Observation also played a crucial role when I was interviewing the union leaders, both at the Manesar plant and Gurgaon plant. The fear among the union leaders of the Manesar plant was palpable. They insisted on interviewing away from the factory gates, despite having a union office inside the plant premises. Without uttering a word on repression, they conveyed the message clearly that a free conversation on workers' struggle could not take place near the factory gates and in front of the hawking eyes of the private security forces employed by MSIL.

Sampling must be compatible with the assumptions belonging to the method or strategy that it serves (Morse & Niehaus 2009, 63). Deciding who should be interviewed or observed, is a significant issue in a qualitative study. In general, it is assumed that, to be able

to purposefully select participants for the study, one must be familiar with the knowledge and experiences of the potential participants. A qualitative sample should be representative of the phenomenon under study. Because the researchers are interested in identifying meaning and the characteristics of phenomena, they must know something about the participants to select the best persons to be in the study (Morse and Niehaus, 2009, pp. 63-64).

It was difficult to have a list of interviewees before I started my fieldwork. But it was important for me to have a representative sample in order to offer some general conclusions on my research. I had discussed before the difficulties of gaining access to the workers. After establishing contact with the PWC, I got in touch with workers who were part of the Maruti movement or still worked at the Manesar plant. Similarly, the networks of Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar (FMS) and its publisher, Sher Singh helped me secure interviews and conversations with several contract workers who had worked in the Manesar plant. I designed my research in such a way that I would contact workers through my initial contacts. This method of snowball sampling (Morse and Niehaus 2009, p. 65; Valentine 2005, p. 117) helped me secure interviews. Hence, instead of having a specific plan on the number of workers to be interviewed, I interviewed as I made new contacts over a period of one year (2014 summer and summer-fall 2015). I conducted 62 interviews which involved workers of different categories, union members, union leaders from the CTUs, two Additional Labour Commissioners, labour lawyers and activists. Using real names of interviewees in the dissertation poses ethical questions about the identity of the workers. Although I wanted to use pseudonyms, the workers I interviewed insisted that I use the real names instead of pseudonyms. It was not surprising that activists, militant workers, and the union members did not hesitate to identify themselves. What surprised me was that even the workers who were employed at the plants during the time of the interview and the workers who had already spent time in the prison, did not hesitate to reveal their true identities. My request for an

interview with the management received no response despite my best efforts. To gain insights into management's perspective on the strikes, I referred to interviews with senior management officials that were published in newspapers. Additionally, I relied on two autobiographies written by former leaders of the MSIL plants. These autobiographies provided valuable insights into the management's approach to union politics and their strategies for restructuring the workforce in the plant.

I have used secondary data in my analysis. A data source is considered secondary when it is a published or unpublished piece of work that has not been generated by the researcher, but is produced by others. A secondary data source usually describes, summarizes, analyses, evaluates and derives from or based on primary source materials – for instance, newspaper reports, research publications, magazine articles, Government publications, reports published by industrial organisations and so on.

I extensively read mainstream and workers' newspapers, reports published by civil society organisations, and periodicals published by the CTUs on labour struggles in the industrial region of Delhi NCR, including the Gurgaon-Manesar region. In particular, I collected every possible news report that had been published on Maruti workers and their politics. Since I was aware of the biases of mainstream newspapers—both English and Hindi—against working class struggles, I started reading newspapers and pamphlets published by activists and smaller labour organisations. I first came across the invaluable FMS, which has been in publication since 1982. FMS devotes its meagre four page-newspaper exclusively to workers' struggles in the Delhi NCR. I also started reading *Radical Notes*, a popular blog on working class politics, *Mazdoor Bigul*, a newspaper run by a small but militant labour organisation, *Bigul Mazdoor Dasta*. Along with these newspapers, I tried to read assessments of strikes and workers' struggles published by organisations like *Krantikari Nawjawan Sabha* (Young Revolutionary Association), *Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra*

(Revolutionary Workers' Centre), Workers' Solidarity Centre (WSC) among others. These newspapers and blogs gave me useful and accurate information about the development of events during the strikes, lock-outs, the violent incident on July 18 and the struggles following the incident. Also, reading these newspapers reports along with pamphlets produced by workers themselves provided me an opportunity to closely look at the nature of class consciousness of workers. The reports and statements issued by the Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU) were also a crucial source of useful information. I also made use of autobiographies written by two former senior officials who had been intimately involved with the decision-making process at Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL) and later on at Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIl). These autobiographies offered insights into management's strategies on dealing with working class politics in the Gurgaon plant.

This research project has followed a mixed method approach that has both qualitative core component and a quantitative supplementary component (Mores and Niehaus 2009, 14). Similarly, Sayer (1992, pp. 162-164) talks about extensive and intensive research as parts of a mixed method approach. In extensive research, the focus is primarily on discovering common properties and general patterns. Through extensive research, I discovered the general patterns of class struggle in the auto industry in Gurgaon-Manesar and the role played by different institutions in these struggles. There exist several common patterns in working class politics in the auto industry located in Gurgaon-Manesar: the contentious relation between permanent and contract workers; spontaneous nature of strikes; the institutional routes followed by trade unions to resolve conflicts with the management; and the politics of compromise followed by plant-level unions. Sayer (1992, p. 163) defines intensive research method as a method that is concerned with how a causal process works out in a particular case or a few cases. This method also sheds light on what agents in a particular situation do and what kinds of changes are produced due to the action of the agents. Causal explanation is key to this method which

uses mainly qualitative methods such as causal analysis, participant observation, and interactive interviews. I used intensive method to locate individual actors/agents (the Maruti workers), conducted semi-structured interviews to find out about their class consciousness and the struggles they have been a part of to arrive at a general picture of class consciousness of the Maruti workers. Moreover, I used this method to map changes in working class politics in the Manesar plant over a period of time (2007-2017) and find out about the roles played by the state, trade unions, the management, and the Maruti workers.

1.6 Predicaments of Fieldwork

The transition from reading and writing on working class consciousness and politics to meeting workers involved in class struggle and understand their consciousness was not a smooth affair. My initial plan was to talk to MSIL's Manesar workers, both currently employed and terminated, followed by interviews and conversations with CTU leaders and factory-based unions who had taken part in the Maruti workers' struggle. My position as a researcher based in a foreign university secured me interviews with the CTU representatives in Gurgaon and several plant-based unions. However, I could not secure interviews with either the Manesar workers' union or the Provisional Working Committee (PWC) which was leading the Maruti movement after the July 18 violent incident.

During my first round of fieldwork in 2014, the workers were protesting against the state government and the Maruti management on the completion of two years of the July 18 incident and imprisonment of hundreds of workers, including the union members. I contacted the Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU) for interviews, but they refused to meet me. The PWC, which was formed in 2012 after the union was imprisoned, did not want to meet me either. The most difficult thing at this point was to convince the workers that I did not have any ties with the management, and I was conducting research to understand Manesar

workers' struggles and politics. In addition, the fieldwork did not make any progress because I used academic language to seek interviews. For instance, when I told the PWC members that I wanted to study the consciousness (*chetna* in Hindi) of workers, they could not relate to what I was saying. I received cold shoulders from everyone I met in my first two weeks in the field.

The Maruti workers were unwilling to give me an entry into their world of trials and tribulations, failures and struggles. The situation proved even more difficult for me as arrests were still being made in 2014 in connection with the violent incident at the Manesar plant on July 18, 2012. It was but natural for workers to suspect my motives when the police and state administration used coercive mechanisms to suppress the movement. I did not want to start my fieldwork with interviewing union leaders as I believed that an authentic understanding of the events, including strikes, will come from ordinary workers who are not part of any established unions. Having failed to get workers to talk to me in the months of March-April 2014, I started reading reports on the strikes that rocked the automobile belt in 2011. I also began reading on different accounts of the events on the July 18, 2012.

The general elections were being held during April-May 2014, in which the CTU leaders were campaigning for their respective political parties. After the elections, I secured interviews with Gurgaon-based union leaders of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and with their assistance, I spoke to AITUC-affiliated HMSI union which is a major union in the IMT Manesar and played a critical in the union formation efforts of the Maruti's Manesar workers. I started off with asking questions on trade union politics in the region, the role of the CTUs, the problem of contract workers, and wages. I got more interviews with union officials from Hind Mazdoor Sangh (HMS), Centre for Indian Trade Union (CITU), and Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). However, all these contacts with the CTUs did not help me get an audience with the Maruti workers.

Having failed to talk to any of the workers who had worked or were still working at the Manesar plant, I looked for activists who were a part of the Maruti movement in different phases. I started off with the *Bigul Mazdoor Dasta* (Bigul Workers' Group), but it did not yield any results as *Bigul* had already distanced itself from the Maruti movement. Then I reached out to the comrades from *Radical Notes (RN)*,[5] who were involved with the strikes in 2011. This proved to be a major breakthrough, and through the comrades of RN I contacted the Provisional Working Committee (PWC) members. I secured my first interview with Manesar workers. However, the PWC did not let its guard down in the face of state oppression and arrest of its members. I was asked to come to the District Courts premises in Gurgaon. I met two members of the PWC in a labour lawyers' chamber. The PWC was apprehensive of meeting new people as the police arrested a former member on flimsy grounds, and consistently threatened others with arrests if they did not stop their organising activities supporting the imprisoned Maruti workers.

The meeting and interviews with the members of PWC proved to be a watershed moment in my fieldwork. It opened newer avenues for me by securing interviews with the union members of MSWU and members of the Gurgaon based union Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU). However, I failed to get access to workers who were not part of the union but took active part in the struggle. So far, I had been talking to only permanent workers, both employed and terminated. Despite my best attempts, I could not establish contacts with contract workers, trainees, apprentices, and casual workers. While the MSWU had distanced itself from the non-permanent workers employed in the plant, the PWC had lost touch with terminated contract workers who worked in the Manesar plant until July 2012. Through the comrades at *Radical Notes,* I met Sher Singh, the editor of a monthly workers' newspaper

[5] Radical Notes is a web portal (https://radicalnotes.org) where a group of activist-scholars reflect on the theoretical and practical implications of workers' struggles in India. Broadly, they are located in the political tradition of Italian Autonomists inspired by Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, and Sergio Bologna.

Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar (Faridabad Worker's Newspaper; FMS henceforth). The newspaper distributes more than 25,000 copies every month among workers. During the monthly distribution of this workers' newspaper, I managed to speak to more workers who were contract workers at the Manesar plant before the July 18 incident. The ball just started rolling, and through these contract workers, I got in touch with apprentices, trainees and casuals who had worked or were still working at the Manesar plant. I also got in touch with contract workers who had worked at the Manesar plant but had moved to Suzuki Powertrain, Bellsonica, SKH Ltd., and scores of other factories which form part of MSIL's supply chain. Despite my familiarity with the MSWU, I did not get access to the Company Trainees (CTs) who were appointed for six months at a time after the termination of over 2000 workers in the wake of the July 18 incident. Once again, while I was distributing copies of FMS, I came in touch with two CTs who were working at the Manesar plant in the summer of 2015, and through these trainees I met a number of other CTs who had either worked in the plant or were still working.

What followed were multiple visits to the court to meet the PWC members and conversations around various issues related to working class struggles in the automobile belt of Gurgaon-Manesar. Adjacent to the district court is the District Labour Court of Gurgaon where unions and aggrieved workers gathered for reconciliation meetings and verdicts in legal disputes between the management and the workers. On days I was not talking to/interviewing workers, I visited the labour court to observe workers engage in conversations ranging from outright despair to possibilities of hope. It opened a window to the consciousness of workers of different sectors ranging from construction and stone quarry to textile and information technology.

The entire Gurgaon-Manesar automobile region was full of journalists and activists, mainly because of the struggles taking place in different factories regularly. Moreover, the

agitation by Maruti workers was still going on at different scales, and workers at both Gurgaon and Manesar plant were apprehensive of the possibility of management officials targeting them if it was found out that they are sympathetic to the movement. In this situation, my role as a researcher was not always above suspicion. I attempted to communicate to the workers that my purpose was not to find out what happened on July 18 but to understand what workers were going through at the Manesar plant. I interviewed workers in their neighbourhoods, in public spaces like parks, in labour courts, in metro stations, and during public meetings. The workers who had been terminated were alienated from any kind of working-class politics in the region. They were looking for work in other factories, and this was proving to be even more difficult, mainly because of their past association with MSIL. I also met with workers who were out on bail in connection with the July 18 incident in the District Court premises. The world had turned upside down for many of them.

1.7 Organisation of the Dissertation and Outline of the Chapters

The dissertation is organised in the following way. This introductory chapter lays out the context and presents the research questions. It also introduces the theoretical framework, and the methodology deployed to conduct the study. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical approach to class consciousness from a Marxist perspective. The framework predominantly draws from the literature on class consciousness in the writings Marx and Engels, Lenin, Lukacs, and Gramsci. This chapter also makes use of Indian historiography on the studies of class consciousness, and the existing literature on consciousness and action in the Maruti movement. Consciousness and struggle operate under given material conditions. It is to these conditions that I turn to in Chapter 3 to offer a broad outline of the political economy of India, including its automobile industry. The chapter describes the evolution of the automobile industry in India, its geographical spread, the condition of labour, and working class struggles in the industry. Chapters 4 describes the working and living conditions of

workers in the auto industry in Delhi and its surrounding areas known as Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). More specifically, this chapter analyses workers' working and living conditions at Maruti's Manesar plant. Chapter 5 examines the dialectic of strikes and class consciousness by looking at the shifts and contradictions in workers' consciousness as they come into conflict with the state and its institutions and conventional trade union politics in the region during the strikes and lock-outs. Strikes have a tendency to radically transform workers' consciousness. However, this process is neither linear nor irreversible. The chapter scrutinises the changing nature of class consciousness among workers during the protracted class struggle in 2011, and its impact on the nature of collective action. Chapter 6 probes workers' consciousness and struggle-both inside and outside of the plant-in the context of the violent incident in the plant in July, 2012. We have stated before that class consciousness moves in an un-linear manner, and the gains in consciousness made during a particular phase of class struggle are not irreversible. This chapter critically examines the shifts in consciousness and action of Maruti workers mediated by state intervention and violence, changing strategies of the management and the dynamics of workers' politics inside and outside of the plant. Chapter 7 summarises the arguments of the dissertation, outlines its theoretical contributions and limitations, and highlights the areas for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and an Alternative Framework

2:1 Introduction

The eminent philosopher of Marxist dialectics, Bertell Ollman, remarked that "studying class consciousness[6] has something in common with trying to catch a wave at the moment when it breaks and all movement toward this point is treated as development, as preliminary, as the unfolding of a potential" (Ollman, 1987, p, 71). The "breaking of the wave" is the moment of a revolutionary situation that signifies a higher level of class consciousness. Class consciousness has always been an immensely significant philosophical and political category in the revolutionary tradition of Marxism since the days of Marx and Engels. It was considered an essential element in the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist society because without a class-conscious working class it is not possible to achieve a working-class revolution. However, historical events have not always been favourable to such a Marxist project, and a major reason behind this is the absence of a revolutionary class consciousness along with an absence of a revolutionary leadership armed with such a consciousness. The historical and political events of the twentieth century have cast long shadow over the importance of class consciousness for revolutionary political projects. The October Revolution of 1917 did not spread to other parts of the world with the same fervour as it did in Russia. The development of Stalinism as a bureaucratic system further raised questions about the efficacy of socialism and the importance of class consciousness among the working class. Similarly, the anti-colonial movements consolidated around nationalist

[6] Class consciousness is of two types: working class consciousness and bourgeoisie consciousness. Lukacs (1967, p, 59) points that bourgeoisie and proletariat are the only pure classes in bourgeois society. Our discussion on class consciousness in this chapter and subsequent chapters refers to working-class consciousness. For a discussion on bourgeoisie class consciousness see Miliband, 1971. A recent elaboration on different aspects of bourgeois consciousness can be found in Das 2017, pp. 417-427.

consciousness and nationalist projects of nation-building while rallying support for the national bourgeoisie, which has ended up collaborating with imperialist bourgeoisie.

The defeats and decline of working-class movements accompanied these historical events in different parts of the world, although this process has always been highly uneven. Such a decline has coincided with the emergence of theoretical trends such as postmodernism which has reduced the questions of class and class consciousness to issues of discourse and language, far removed from the objective material conditions of production and reproduction of social life (Hindess & Hist, 1975; Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Stedman Jones, 1984; for a Marxist critique, see Callinicos, 1991; Palmer, 1990; Wood, 1998;). While the disappearance of manufacturing jobs in the developed countries of the global North because of de-industrialisation has led commentators (for instance, Gorz, 1982) to argue that class is not a relevant category to understand societies in these countries, concentration of such jobs in the countries of the global South has led to arguments about class in a different direction. The feminist movements, civil rights movements, queer politics, and national and ethnic identities brought attention to non-class identities of the working class. [7] It is also argued that class and class consciousness have limited relevance in understanding working-class collective struggles in the countries of the global south where non-class identities and locations trump class and class consciousness (Chakrabarty 1988, 1989; Prakash, 1994).

This chapter presents a theoretical framework for understanding working-class consciousness in a concrete geographical and historical context. I specify this framework by drawing on the works of Marx, Lenin, Lukacs and Gramsci, who combined theoretical ideas with practical aspects of working class politics in order to arrive at general formulations on

[7] David McNally (2015) uses the concept of the "unity of the diverse" to overcome the limitations posed by a binary of class and non-class identities in the constitution of the working class. He argues that multiple social identities are not external; these identities have an internal relation with the working class and an emancipatory politics must take into account multiple forms of social oppression.

class consciousness. These formulations are at once abstract and empirically embedded in concrete historical and geographical contexts. Marx wrote about class consciousness while reflecting on an incipient labour movement taking shape in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lenin's reflections on class consciousness emerged in the context of the formation of a revolutionary party in order to fight against the Czarist regime and establish socialism, whereas Lukacs wrote in the immediate aftermath of the Russian revolution. Gramsci reflected on the consciousness of workers in a historical moment when working-class revolutions failed to spread beyond Russia. Thus, the insights on class consciousness were drawn upon real empirical events and processes, but were not reduced to the immediate outcome of those events and processes. I place these theoretical insights in the Indian context to understand the significance and limitations of these approaches to examine working class consciousness in a capitalist liberal democracy in the global south.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, I outline the basic formulations on class and class consciousness in Marx's (and Engels') political writings followed by a discussion of Lukacs' notion of imputed consciousness. I then examine different aspects of class consciousness found in the works of Lenin and Gramsci. The discussion on Lenin will centre on the dialectic of spontaneity and class consciousness, and the role of "consciousness from without." In the third section, I critically examine the literature on the strike and its relation with class consciousness. It is argued that pre-capitalist and/or non-class identities and the consciousness of these identities have a negative impact on class consciousness. In the fourth section, I will subject this argument to a critical scrutiny in the context of India. Having reviewed the literature, I identify some gaps and present an alternative framework for understanding class consciousness in a concrete situation. The central purpose of this chapter is to provide a Marxist perspective on class consciousness,

which will combine elements of abstract theory and empirical reality, and offer a vantage point to study working class politics in contemporary India.

Section 2.2 Existing Marxist ideas about class consciousness

Although Marx never wrote systematically on the concept of class and his attempt to offer a definition of class in the Volume III of *Capital* remains incomplete, Marx used the term class in two senses: first, it stands for a group of people who are in a similar relationship to the means of production by an objective criterion, and more specifically, the group of exploiters and the exploited; second, there is a subjective facet to the concept of class which is class consciousness. In the latter sense, class consciousness is a form of consciousness where social classes are aware of their objective location in the structure of a given mode of production and realise the tasks they have to perform to change their material conditions which is appropriate to their structural location. Marx and Engels wrote in *The Holy Family*:

> It is not a question of what this or that proletariat, or even the whole proletariat at the moment considers as its aim. *It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will be historically compelled to do* (Marx & Engels, 1975, p. 37; italics in original).

According to Marx and Engels, what defines class consciousness of the proletariat or the working class is that regardless of the objectives that the working-class has set for itself subjectively, a true marker of class consciousness is not just the empirically given subjective vision, but the vision which corresponds to the objective position of the working class in capitalism. Marx elaborates further that common interests are not enough for the development of class consciousness. He wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

> Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital had created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a *class as against capital, but not yet for itself*. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and *constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests...*'(Marx, 1975, p. 173; Italics added).

In Marx's writings, the concept of class and class consciousness are deeply inter-connected: class relations can exist without class consciousness, while class consciousness is rooted in—if not reducible to—class relations, understood in terms of objective material conditions. Marx's insights in the above mentioned quotes point toward two facts: For Marx, structural conditions are only a first step towards a group of people located in determinate relations of production being defined as a class, and he identifies them as class-in-itself; the second fact is the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself when the working class realises its objective tasks in a historical condition and makes efforts to realise those tasks which are not limited to any sectional or national interests but class interests *in general*. Class-for-itself is a dynamic concept in which in which the working class is "in struggle," "becomes united," and "constitutes itself' in active, historical processes of struggling, uniting, and constituting (Fantasia, 1995, p. 273). In Marx's writings, the concept of class acquires a full meaning when social classes are class-conscious (Bottomore, 1971, pp. 49-51; Hobsbawm 1971, p. 6). The subjective facet of class and its presumed absence among the working-class has been used to deny the primacy of class understood in terms of a structural relation and class is reduced to class consciousness and ideology. This position has been the bedrock of discourse analysis inspired by postmodernism and poststructuralism (Eagleton, 2007, 2011).

Writing a few decades later, Lukacs develops Marx's notion of "class interests in general" by talking about what he refers to as imputed consciousness. He wrote his celebrated

work *History and Class Consciousness*, between 1919 and 1922 during the revolutionary crisis in European society and the Russian Revolution specifically. Lukacs was convinced that he was writing his book on the eve of the world revolution, the overthrow of capitalism and the advent of a classless society (Goldman, 1971, p. 69). Thus, it became imperative for Lukacs to talk about a consciousness which is not narrow or sectional but universal, and which is appropriate for world revolution. It is in this context that he developed his notion of imputed consciousness which will do away with any distinction between the subject (the proletariat) and the object (class position of this proletarian in capitalist totality) (Stedman Jones, 1971, pp. 30-32).

Following Marx, Lukacs distinguishes between the objective fact of class and the theoretical deductions drawn by classes about their interests from their objective location. In addition, he makes another distinction: between the actual ideas which human beings form about class and which is the subject matter of historical study, and what he called 'imputed' class consciousness. Lukacs wrote:

> By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thought and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation...(*N)ow class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions imputed in a particular typical place in the process of production*. (Lukacs, 2016, p. 52; italics in original).

The imputed class consciousness of the working class does not correspond to the actual empirical consciousness in a place and time when workers struggle for immediate economic gains and better working conditions. On the contrary, imputed consciousness is determined

by class interests within a given social formation, independent of the subjectivity of individuals who may or may not perceive those interests (Santos, 1970, p. 184). According to Lukacs, the working class manifest this consciousness not in normal times, but only during the times of a crisis (Stedman Jones, 1971, 32). Lukacs, however, makes it clear that the class consciousness of the working class lags behind changes in objective material conditions and economic crisis alone cannot generate imputed or revolutionary class consciousness leading to revolutionary upheaval. Lukacs noted:

> The class consciousness of the proletariat does not develop uniformly… parallel with the objective economic crisis. Large sections of the proletariat remain under the tutelage of the bourgeoisie; even the severest of the economic crisis fails to shake them in their attitude… Proletarian ideology lags behind economic crisis (Lukacs, 2016, pp. 304-5).

Lukacs finds solution to this problem of working class consciousness lagging behind objective conditions in the form of a political party which will bring revolutionary Marxist ideology to the working class (Stedman Jones, 1971, p. 51). Starosta (2003) argues that for Lukacs, transformation of human subjectivity (through action informed by Marxist theory) plays an important role in the transcendence of capitalism along with economic crisis (p. 42). And the key to achieving imputed consciousness is the realisation by the working class that exploitation of labour's productive power is central to the reproduction of capital (Starosta, 2003, p. 55).[8] For Lukacs, this realisation and the ultimate transformation of consciousness is possible through free action of the working class (Lukacs, 1971, p. 209, cited in Starosta, 2003, p. 56). The notion of free action remains vague and Lukacs does not offer any concrete argument on how to mark the passage from empirical to imputed consciousness. Lukacs'

[8] Althusser (2006) contests this view that capitalist production process alone is responsible for reproduction of capital. Ideology and ideological state apparatuses play an important role in the reproduction of capital.

theory of class consciousness does not account for the significance of empirical consciousness. The trade union struggles were taking shape while Lukacs wrote about class consciousness, but there are no reflections on this important form of class struggle and their impact on class consciousness. Kelly (1988) states in this context that Lukacs did not offer a distinctive theory of the dynamics, phases or specific types of consciousness (p. 86). Moreover, the two poles of consciousness, empirical and imputed, are treated as static forms, devoid of the dialectical movement that takes place between these two poles of consciousness. Lukacs' concept of class consciousness operates at the abstract level with less emphasis on its historical and political grounding in concrete political situations and class struggles and resorts to idealism in explaining political action (Colletti, 1973; Stedman Jones, 1971). Terming his formulations in *History and Class Consciousness* as "revolutionary messianism," Lukacs wrote in the *Preface to the New Edition* [1967] that he was unable to move beyond the notion of an imputed class consciousness. Class consciousness, adds Lukacs, becomes intellectual and contemplative in his work. He admitted that his approach to class consciousness follows from an abstract and idealistic concept of praxis (Lukacs, 2016, pp. xviii-xix), but did not offer a way out of this idealist conception. It is Lenin who locates abstract theory in concrete contexts and provides, to quote Lukacs, 'an authentic Marxist of a practical movement' (Lukacs, 2016, xix) to arrive at his theory of class consciousness.

In *What is to be Done?* Lenin confronted two developments in late nineteenth century Russia: the inability of the socialist left to intervene in the growing workers' movement and the attempt to rationalise this inability not by working for a working class hegemony though political organisation, but by supporting workers' struggles over immediate economic reforms within the system (Blackledge, 2018, p. 488). He specifically talks about three crucial issues to understand the existing level of consciousness and its ultimate transformation to class consciousness proper: the character and content of agitations in 1860s

and 1870s as well as the strikes in St. Petersburg in the 1890s; organisational tasks appropriate to the political situation, and building a militant, all-Russia working class organisation. Lenin draws a distinction between the strikes that occurred in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century and especially in the 1860s and 70s, and the strikes in St. Petersburg in the late 1890s. He considers these strike movements spontaneous, but asserts that there is a fundamental difference between the content of spontaneity reflected in these two strike movements. While former strikes were accompanied by merely the destruction of machinery, the latter strikes manifested conscious spontaneity and registered *progress* made by the working class in that period. The latter strikes betrayed more advanced consciousness due to articulation of definite demands and a discussion of lessons learned from other strike movements. These flashes of consciousness represented class consciousness in embryo in contrast to the resistance of the oppressed, which marked the strikes in the 1860s and 70s. (Lenin, 1902, p. 17).

Having stated that there is a difference between resistance of the oppressed[9] and conscious spontaneity, Lenin argues that the conscious spontaneous struggles do not possess class consciousness. Spontaneity represents consciousness in embryonic form. These struggles are not conscious of the fact that their (class) interests stand in fundamental opposition to the (class) interest of the modern political and social system. Lenin says:

> *there could not have been* [class]… consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the

[9] Resistance of the oppressed takes many (spontaneous) forms including spontaneous actions such as breaking machines and beating the representatives of capital such as the managerial staff in a factory. These actions can also be organised: for instance, during the general strikes called by the trade unions in India, workers often resort to transport stoppage, confrontations with the police, breaking vehicles and rioting. The peasant movements in India are full of such examples where peasant have engaged in destruction of landlords' property. The difference between these two forms of actions lies in the conscious strategy of the strike actions/peasant movements and their specific demands and the lack thereof in the resistance of the oppressed.

> employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. (Lenin, 1902, pp. 17-8; italics in original).

Conscious spontaneity, according to Lenin, is not enough to develop class consciousness which has to be brought from outside. Shandro (1995, p, 272**)** calls this thesis "consciousness from without" in contrast to the thesis of "consciousness from within," which refers to workers' inability to develop class consciousness from within, i.e., from within the sphere of production and activities generated in that space. In the absence of a conscious element, which for Lenin meant a revolutionary party, bourgeois ideology will strengthen its hold over the consciousness of the working class because a working class movement cannot elaborate an independent ideology on its own. Draper notes that the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness manifests Lenin's understanding of the material basis of politics. Draper says, "There are several things that happen 'spontaneously', and what will win out is not decided only by spontaneity" (Draper, 1999, p. 191, cited in Blackledge, 2018, p. 494). Lenin elaborates further:

> *Spontaneous* development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology...for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism...and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is t*o combat spontaneity, to divert* the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy (Lenin, 1902, p. 23; italics in original).

Lenin makes two crucial points here. For him, the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology because it is far older than socialist ideology; more developed, and it has at its disposal more means of dissemination (Lenin, 1902, p. 24) However, what is *subject to this domination is not the working class as*

such, but the spontaneous unfolding of the movement, that is, its movement considered in abstraction from the socialist vanguard, informed by Marxist theory, and therefore conscious (Shandro, 1995, p. 284).

How does Lenin propose to combat spontaneity? He argues that Social-Democrats (revolutionaries) must neither confine themselves to economic struggles nor make economic exposures of low wage and exploitative working conditions their predominant activity. Instead, political education and raising the consciousness of the working class must be a priority for the Social Democrats. Raising the political consciousness of workers must involve organisation of the political exposure of the autocracy in *all its aspects* (Lenin, 1902, p. 34). He offers a wide and expansive notion of political struggles and consciousness that a revolutionary party must bring to workers**.** He says that a vanguard party must fight against *all cases of tyranny* and not confine itself to wage struggles alone. The Social Democratic party must, in his words, fight against flogging of peasants, corruption of the officials, the suppression against popular strivings, extortion of taxes and the persecution of religious texts among others (Lenin, 1902, p. 35). If the tasks before the revolutionary vanguard and the working-class cover such a broad spectrum of oppression, how is it possible to fight against these oppressions within the parameters of spontaneous working-class movement and trade-union consciousness developed in the sphere of production alone? Lenin offers a solution by expanding the field of class consciousness and the notion of political struggle. Lenin says:

> Working class consciousness cannot be genuine (class)political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter *what class* is affected ... Those who concentrate the attention, observation, and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social-Democrats; for the self-knowledge of the working class is indissolubly bound up ... with ... the relationships between *all* the various

> classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life (Lenin, 1902, p. 42).

Since for Lenin class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, i.e., only from outside the economic struggle, he says that "the sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of *all* classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between *all* classes" (Lenin, 1902, p. 48). Lenin goes on to expand the range of activities a worker must perform in order to be a Social Democrat or a class-conscious worker:

> In order to become a Social-Democrat [communist], the worker must have a clear picture in his mind of the economic nature and the social and political features of the landlord and the priest, the high state official and the peasant, the student and the vagabond; he must know their strong and weak points; he must grasp the meaning of all the catchwords and sophisms by which each class and each stratum *camouflages* its selfish strivings and its real "inner workings"... he must understand what interests are reflected by certain institutions and certain laws and how they are reflected ... These comprehensive political exposures are an essential and *fundamental* condition for training the masses in revolutionary activity (Lenin,1902 p. 43; italics in original).

Lenin expands on Marx's notion of class for itself or class consciousness by adding several stages of class consciousness and different ways to achieve this consciousness. The biggest contribution that Lenin has made in this respect is the importance of bringing class political consciousness from outside because the economic struggles in the sphere of production cannot comprehend the range of issues that the working class has to realise or a real sense of totality in order to become class conscious.[10] And this cannot be generated on its own but has

[10] To argue for a consciousness from without, i.e., outside of economic struggles, does not mean that the working class does not engage in non-economic struggles or non-trade union struggles. A series of violent protests broke out in India in 2020-21 against a citizenship law that denies Muslims citizenship rights. The protests were partly spontaneous and partly organised and were certainly political. However, the working class

to be developed by a vanguard party or organisation, well versed in Marxist theory, which means being familiar with the inner workings of capitalism, in a constant interaction with the working masses. The importance of Marxist theory and an organisation guided by that lies not in its superior understanding of a set of theoretical principles but in unpacking how exploitation operates in capitalism, its relation with the domination of the working classes, and implication of capitalist state institutions, both in coercive and ideological forms, in the continued reproduction of an exploitative class relation.

Rosa Luxemburg is often counterposed to Lenin because of her celebration of spontaneity in revolutionary struggles. However, as Kimber (2023) argues, Luxemburg does not talk about a concept of "pure" spontaneity where the emphasis is more on the initial outburst of discontent among the working class. Rather, this outburst or spontaneity leads workers beyond specific issues the initial outburst gave expression to. For Luxemburg, this spontaneity leads to mass strikes that ignites class consciousness among the working class. She further contends that mass strikes and revolutions do not emerge without the pre-existence of socialist ideas and leadership. Speaking of the Bolshevik revolution, Luxemburg wrote that revolutions was not "shot out of a pistol" but developed on the foundation laid by the political work of the social-democratic party (Luxemburg, 2022, p. 80-82). Highlighting the work of the Bolshevik party, Luxemburg further noted,

> The sum total of class consciousness, political maturity and idealism that was given expression in the mass revolt of the St Petersburg proletariat, and which has become a historical reality, must be credited to the account of the untiring, decades-long labour, the "old mole's work", of socialist agitation, or to state it more precisely, to the

protesters were not conscious of the role of the right-wing state, its relation with the capitalist class, and its strategy to create an authoritarian regime that combines worst forms of capitalism and religion. Absence of this consciousness differentiates spontaneous protests from conscious protests, and this has significant implications for class struggle.

agitators of the Russian Social Democratic Party. (Luxemburg, 2022 cited in Kimber, 2023)

Although Luxemburg highlighted the importance of spontaneity in bringing masses onto class struggle, she did not miss the importance of political leadership and organisation along with the socialist ideas that guided these organisations and leadership.

Whereas Lenin made a distinction between different stages of consciousness (embryonic, spontaneity, trade union and class consciousness proper), Gramsci formulated the concept of common sense, its contradictory character and its implications for counter-hegemonic politics (Crehan, 2011; Green & Ives, 2009; Patnaik, 1988). Gramsci considered common sense as a significant element in his theory of hegemony which in classical Marxist formulation refers to the "unique position of the working class as the only independent revolutionary force under capitalism, as well as its political and ideological relations leading other social groups" (Saccarelli, 2020, p. 179). In Gramsci's own framework, hegemony is used incoherently in the *Prison Notebooks* and connotes different meanings: class alliance of the proletariat with other exploited groups in a common struggle against capital; creation of a new politico-economic historical bloc without internal contradictions; a social group providing intellectual and moral direction in society along with political domination (Anderson, 1976, pp. 18-25). The concept of consent and coercion occupies a central place in Gramsci's conceptualisation of hegemony. For instance, Femia (1975) locates hegemony in consent ordained from the subaltern groups, whereas Saccarelli (2020) makes the case that coercion or political domination is undermined in the discussions on analysing hegemony. For Gramsci, the hegemonic process is never complete, but an ongoing process where consent[11] of the subordinate classes are continuously sought. Within this conceptual

[11] Femia (1975) considers consent a vague concept which refers to a number of formulations: as active commitment to bourgeois rule; acceptance of the domination of higher classes due to their role in the place of

framework of hegemony, Gramsci examines the nature of popular consciousness of the subaltern groups by examining common sense and its significance for revolutionary politics. Exposure to common sense occurs through the concepts absorbed in the course of our socialization, exposure to the media, and participation in the practices informed and legitimised by those concepts (Cox, 1996, p.1).

Common sense, according to Gramsci, is uncritical and fragmented in which the bearers "take part in a conception of the world, mechanically imposed by the external world, i.e., by one of the social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world..." (Gramsci,1971, p, 323). Gramsci argues that those who possess this consciousness "simultaneously belong to a multiplicity of mass human groups. The personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history..." (Gramsci, 1971, p.324). He distinguishes between common sense and a consciousness which is critical and conscious. The latter is a consciousness in which one "choose[s] one's own sphere of activity and take[s] an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, *refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality"* (Gramsci,1971, pp. 323-4; italics added). The central characteristic of the conception of common sense is its fragmentary character. It is not, Gramsci writes,

> a single unique conception, identical in time and space but takes countless forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, fragmentary, incoherent...in *conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy* it is (Gramsci, 1971, p. 419; italics added).

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production (class rule); accepting the view that the interests of the dominant groups are the interests of larger society (pp.31-32).

Common sense is also contradictory; it is reflected in a contrast between thought and action of the subaltern groups. Gramsci continues:

> *the contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order*. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only *embryonic*; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes-when, that is, the group is acting as an *organic totality.* But this same group has, for reasons of *submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group*; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in "normal times" – that is when *its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate*. (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 326-7; italics added).

Although the subaltern classes have their own conception of the world (independent and autonomous), due to intellectual subordination (hegemony of the ruling class) it gives consent to a conception of a world which is derived from the ideological influence of the ruling class. However, the suggestion that this state of subordination exists in "normal times" means revolutionary times can disrupt the subordination of the subaltern classes. Having laid out the constitutive elements of common sense and the contrast between thought and action of social groups, Gramsci further explains the contradictory character of this common sense:

> The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be *historically in opposition* to his activity. One might almost say that he has *two theoretical consciousness* (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit

> in his activity and which in reality unites him with his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333).

Gramsci argues that theoretical consciousness or thought stands in opposition to practical activity which is more radical than thought. This formulation underscores the hold of ideology on the working class or subaltern groups even when their actions are in opposition to the existing order, including the ideological manifestations. It, however, misses the dialectical relation between these two elements which defies a neat distinction. Thought or consciousness has played a significant role in working class movements across the world.[12] The ideas of workers' state, socialism, and equality articulated by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia influenced working class movements as well as anti-colonial movements across the world. Moreover, Gramsci ignores the impact of transformations cased by practical activity on thought and its verbal expression.

According to Gramsci, the structure of subaltern consciousness comprises multiple elements and this consciousness is inherently contradictory. For instance, this contradictory consciousness may involve factory occupation, seeking assistance or sympathetic hearing from the state or its administrative departments, demanding bourgeois parties to come to their rescue or raising narrow nationalistic demands. This consciousness in a group of individuals forming a part of the subordinate group or working-class is rooted in material lives of these individuals and groups, and is central to their being as subalterns, subject to a broader hegemonic process (Patnaik, 1988, pp. 4-7). Since this consciousness is not identical in space and time, subaltern activity, including highly militant and radical activities, will remain chaotic, fragmented and at variance with one another without the aid of a *systematic*

[12] The history feminist movements, anti-racist and anti-caste movements show that consciousness of a subordinated position in a society has led to radical political actions despite the presence of all pervasive dominant ideologies on gender, race and caste.

philosophy, which in Gramsci's coded prison writings refer to Marxism. Along with the temporal dimension, common sense also has a spatial character as traditions, folklore and the broader project of hegemony are socially embedded (Ekers et al, 2013; Loftus, 2020). Patnaik (1988, p. 5,) argues that subaltern consciousness, in the absence of a systematic philosophy, concerns itself mainly with "immediacy," while the totality of social and political relations remains distant and external objects. In the absence of a resolution of the contradiction between theory and practice or a contradictory consciousness, conditions are created for political passivity. Nevertheless, the starting point for a revolutionary and transformative politics must always be an analysis of common sense in all its contradictions and complexities as it exists in a given time and space. This common sense "which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude... *has to be made* ideologically coherent" (Gramsci,1971, p. 421; italics added).

The transformation of the condition of subalternity requires not the elimination of common sense but a critique from the stand point of systematic philosophy (read Marxism) and transformation into a revolutionary consciousness (Green and Ives, 2009, p.7). This process of transformation of common sense and making it ideologically coherent is not a spontaneous process. Subaltern groups cannot overcome their intellectual and moral subordination on their own (reflected in their common sense or thought). The dialectic of thought and action which in its contradictory state produces political-passivity requires an external agency to unravel the ideas of the ruling order and engage in an act of demystification[13] (Femia, 1975, p.35). Gramsci explicates this formulation as follows: A

[13] The term demystification presumes another key concept in Marxist social theory: false consciousness. Marx and Engels used this term to refer to the consciousness of the working class where it does not recognise its true interests and accepts the ideology of the ruling class which is against its own interests. This concept has generated a lot of debate on its supposedly "elitist' character and has been used to argue that the usage of this term implies denying the working class of its agency in perceiving what is true and what is false. This argument gained currency with the flourishing of the postmodern social theory which considered 'true' and 'false' as questions of discourse, far removed from objective material conditions. Brass (2019) argues that the falsity of consciousness is not a problem of perception of a problem because exploited groups are aware of their

human mass does not ‘distinguish’ itself, does not become independent, ‘for itself’, without, in a broad sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without . . . organizers and leaders (Gramsci, 1948, cited in Femia, 1975, p. 35). Thus, Gramsci underscores the importance of organisations or political parties in developing a critical consciousness among the subaltern groups and transcend the common sense (the moral and intellectual ideas) these groups inherit from the dominant social groups or the ruling order.

Section 2.3 Strike and Class Consciousness

Every strike is simultaneously a struggle within and against capitalism. Workers engaging in strikes struggle for higher wages and better working conditions, and they pursue these objectives withing the framework of capitalist production relations. Simultaneously, to achieve these objectives, they organise collectively against their employers. This struggle is rooted in the antagonistic interests of labour and capital (Callinicos, 2004, p.217). Strike is the most ubiquitous form of class struggle in capitalism. Marxists have recognised its potential to radically transform class consciousness. Although the revolutionary Marxists discussed at length on ways to achieve class consciousness in order to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism, they also recognised the significance of industrial strikes as these forms of struggles played a role in making an incipient working class aware of the exploitative class relation under capitalism. With the growth of trade unions and in the absence of in the absence of revolutionary movements in much of the later part of the twentieth and in the early part of twenty first century, strikes assumed even a bigger role in

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oppression and unequal position in society, but is about perceptions of political action to remedy the situation. Workers and peasants are aware of the existence of oppression, injustice, exploitation; however, this perception assumes a false form when they consider nationalism, fascism, or bourgeois democracy can improve their material conditions (p.174). The false consciousness of the working class is not a reflection of the subordination of this class, but a implies the embeddedness of a hegemonic order (capitalism, religious chauvinism, anti-immigrant ideology) as well as the absence of or weakness of a counter-hegemonic political project. In a more concrete context, DiMaggio (2015) emphasises the impact of hegemony in creating a false consciousness among American working class because they fail to recognise the economic divide between the rich and the poor.

shaping the consciousness of workers. This context explains the rationale for examining the transformative as well as limiting role of strikes in shaping the consciousness of the working class.

In a pamphlet 'On Strikes' Lenin noted that a strike reveals to workers that the state and its various institutions (coercive, legal) side with the interests of the capitalist class (Lenin, 1978). Expanding the scope of strikes' impact on consciousness, Luxemburg pointed out that place-specific and isolated struggles may lead to the development of class consciousness, but surge in class consciousness occur only due to mass action in a period of political and economic crisis (Luxemburg, 1970, p. 189). According to Luxemburg, the class consciousness of striking workers can be raised under specific conditions: large number of strikes, state repression, polarisation in society, and revolutionary propaganda. Consequently, the scale of strikes, and not just initial demands of the strike action, are crucial for advancing the consciousness of workers (Kelly, 1988, p. 94). Strikes based on basic economic struggles propel workers to confront the exploitation and domination of capital, unshackle the hold of ideology, and open up 'an epistemological break' in working class consciousness (Moody & Cohen, 1998, pp. 111-112). A strike disrupts the mundane and the normal. Strike as a form of collective action turns individual worker's antagonism against capital and its various representatives (managers, supervisors, department heads) into an act of resistance by the working class (McCall, 2008). The literature on the impact of strikes on class consciousness revolves around two arguments: first, strikes advance working class consciousness; second, the impact of strikes on class consciousness is uneven and the positive relation is not a preordained fact.

Noting the volatility of working class consciousness, Blackburn (1967) argues that a small change in the relationship between workers and the employer can 'explode' into an awareness by workers' of their dominated situation in a plant and more generally, inequalities

in capitalism. Consequently, a strike against a part of a contract can take the form of a generalised protest. Furthermore, a strike action makes workers aware of their antagonistic relation with the employers. Blackburn presents an overly optimistic picture of a strike in a workplace and its effect on workers' consciousness, transforming from a scale and space specific protest to a more generalised form, whose nature remains unclear. While Blackburn paints an optimistic picture of the impact of strikes on class consciousness, Smith (1978) notes that the thesis of strikes advancing class consciousness of workers is partially true; strikes may also lead to retrogression in consciousness when striking workers fail to establish common cause with the non-striking workers and an intra-class antagonism is created instead of a class antagonism. The difference in attitudes and perception of workers to strikes makes the impact of strikes on class consciousness uneven. When striking workers do not receive support from other workers in the plant, other unions and the community, they fail to identify with other workers and thus register decline in class consciousness (Smith, 1978, pp.459-460). Making a distinction between a successful strike and a defeated strike, scholars argue that in case of the latter, workers experience powerlessness and register less change in class consciousness (Hartley, Kelly, & Nicholson, 1983; Wells, 1986).

The impact of strikes on workers' consciousness is differentiated, and participation in the struggles (attending union meetings, taking initiatives) determines the nature of transformation of consciousness. In the study on Canadian postal workers involvement in a strike in 1987, Langford (1994, 1996) notes that antagonistic relation with the employer does not lead to class consciousness in the absence of solidarity among workers. This solidarity is maintained by only a small minority of workers after the struggle with the employer ends (in a specific period). Not all workers show an advance in class consciousness after a strike, and this advance is based on participation in the collective action against the employer as well as the state. In a study on glassworkers' strike in at Pilkington (UK) in 1970, Lane and Roberts

(1970) argued that the strike encouraged militancy in only a small section of workers; a large majority of workers considered the British society and existing political parties as fair and representative of people's aspirations. On the contrary, the workers' views towards left groups ranged from indifference to disparagement. The miners' struggle in the UK provoked scholarly analysis on the impact of strikes on class consciousness. Reflecting on the miners' strikes in the UK in the early 1970s, Allen (1981) remarked that the strikes led to the disillusionment with the state institutions, but subsided after the demands of the strikers were met. Increase in class consciousness was a temporary phenomenon which did not last long. Presenting a similar picture of the impact of the miners' strike in 1984, on consciousness, Callinicos and Simons (1985) note that a small minority of workers experience radical change in their consciousness. The larger working class was not radicalised enough to continue with any other form of class struggle after the strike was defeated by the conservative Thatcher government.

Richard Hyman in his celebrated work, *Strike,* argues that strikes represent both increasing economic aspirations and an articulation of discontent against oppressive management and work intensity (Hyman, 1972, p. 132). Hyman is sceptical about strike actions transforming trade union consciousness to revolutionary consciousness and questions the efficacy of spontaneous movement of a strike against the management in a plant or sector to challenging the larger structure of capitalism. In a celebrated passage, Hyman writes:

> It is therefore difficult to imagine that strikes could ever spontaneously develop into the mechanism of an open assault on managerial authority, let alone broader political authority. If workers' struggles should acquire a higher rationale than they at present possess, they would almost certainly need to transcend purely industrial forms of organisation. if industrial conflict were to extend into an explicit challenge to existing

> structures of control, this challenge would require the organization and articulation of an openly political movement (Hyman, 1972, pp.143-144).

Hyman makes it clear that a political movement, and not strikes alone, has the potential to challenge capitalism. Participation in strikes lead to changes in perceptions towards the power structure in a specific place and time, but these changes do not constitute revolutionary consciousness. Analysing industrial conflicts including strikes in Britain of the 1960s, Hyman notes that participation in major industrial struggles rarely result in any "explosion of consciousness" which lasts for a longer period of time (Hyman, 1974, p. 126). Analysing the working class politics of the early 1970s, Hyman carried on with this critical note on the impact of industrial militancy on class consciousness and argued that there was 'no clear and extended consciousness of common working-class interests, let alone a coherent vision of an alternative society and a determination to struggle for its achievement' (Hyman, 1975, cited in Mcllory, 2012, p. 66).

Drawing on strikes and trade union struggles in post-war Britain and Western Europe, Mann (1973) outlined four elements of class consciousness: defining oneself as working class (identity); the perception of capitalists as antagonists (opposition); a belief that these two elements determine one's place in society (totality); and a conception of an alternative society. Mann argues that a combination of all these elements leads to revolutionary consciousness which is a rare occurrence (Mann 1973, p. 13). Strikes and workplace conflicts have not led to escalation of conflict and a subsequent transition from opposition to transcendence of capitalism. Outside of insurrectionary conjectures, strikes have not produced revolutionary consciousness among the working class (Mcllroy, 2012, p. 62). In a similar vein, Kelly (1988), drawing on strikes, union membership, political attitudes, participation of the Labour party and involvement of far-left political groups, argues that the

impact of strikes on class consciousness has been meagre and operated within the broader politics of Left reformism.

The impact of strike on class consciousness is uneven. While a limited number of workers, the militant section of the working class, experience a higher level of consciousness, a large majority remain indifferent or do not consider the existence of a long-term conflict between themselves and the employers. Any major change in consciousness of a large section of workers can happen, not under normal circumstances, but in a revolutionary situation, or as Luxemburg has pointed out, during a mass strike. Such strikes have not been frequent events in contemporary capitalist societies barring a few exceptions such as the general strikes organised by Indian trade union federations or the strikes and protests that destabilised the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East in 2010-11. Outside of these significant strike actions, class consciousness has operated within the framework of trade union politics.

Section 2.4 Class Consciousness in the Global South: the case of India

The concept of class consciousness has attracted a lot of criticism for its apparent failure to account for societies with entrenched pre-capitalist consciousness as expressed in caste, religious, and ethnic consciousness. The existence of pre-capitalist or non-class consciousness is not peculiar to India and countries of the global South. The social relations of race, ethnicity, indigeneity and gender coexist with class relations. The question that has been raised is whether the existence of these social relations and the consciousness of these relations impede or negate the emergence of class consciousness among the working class. The recent wave of strikes in the advanced capitalist countries, the struggle by the indigenous populations in Latin America, and protests that rocked the Arab world after 2010, clearly suggest that non-class identities do not preclude class consciousness. Class consciousness in each of these geographical locations has expressed different kinds of demands-better working

conditions and wages, distribution of resources and change in state power, and more radical change in society, including the ouster of autocratic governments. The popular upsurge in an ethnically divided Sri Lanka in 2022 provides a stark example of growth of class consciousness despite the often-rehearsed arguments of deep-rooted ethnic ties and animosity that had dominated this country for several decades. The forms and outcomes in each of these instances is a contingent matter, mediated by a history of class struggle, political organisations, state repression, and concessions given by capital.

Proponents of postcolonial theory argue that societies such as India experienced industrialisation different than the countries of the Western world. This is based on a number of assumptions: absence of individualism and the conceptions of individual rights, existence of pre-capitalist social relations, persistence of a vast agrarian economy, specific trajectory of modernity (Chatterjee, 2008; Gidwani & Wainwright, 2014; Nigam, 2020; Sanyal, 2007). These assumptions have been debated and refuted by scholars (Chibber, 2013; Dasgupta, 2016; Singh, 2014) who argue that the specific social and cultural conditions of Indian society did not alter the essential logic of capital accumulation and class struggle in both colonial and postcolonial India. The social structure of caste is often invoked to even deny the existence of class, class-based exploitation, and importantly, class-based collective struggles in India (Singh, 1998, 2014). This position finds its strongest expression in the widely discussed *Subaltern Studies* (SS) school of historiography in India. The *SS* project intended to chart out a domain of consciousness of the subaltern uninfluenced by what the scholars termed as 'elite' consciousness, which included both nationalist politics and communist politics.[14] The project began with a Gramscian framing of questions of autonomy of the subaltern, but took a more Foucauldian turn when question of power and domination were located in discourse and different knowledge systems. The point of departure is the diving

[14] The fact that the SS scholars do not make any conceptual distinction between the consciousness represented by the nationalist politics and the communist politics is a grave error the project does not admit of.

line between the subaltern and the coloniser which ignored materiality of social relations in Indian society (Sarkar, 1998). The *SS* historians argued that capitalism (colonialism) met its nemesis in community ties in India, and that social analysis and social struggles operate differently in India than they do in the West. As a result, the framework of class analysis does not apply to the Indian case; culture, community and ethnic relations hold a greater analytical significance than class analysis (Chibber 2006; Herring & Aggarwala, 2006; Singh, 2006; Sinha, 2014).

A Marxist interpretation of the relation between capitalism and pre-capitalist socialist identities asserted that capitalist factory would act as a powerful agent of social change and ultimately dissolve old particularistic social relations of caste, religion, and ethnicity and replace them with universal social relation like class (Das Gupta, 1996). Sen (1977) argued that religion and caste impeded the growth of class consciousness among workers in India. Sen observed:

> Class consciousness of the proletariat, as a general rule, rises in proportion to the advance of economic struggles against capitalist exploitation. But in a colony,[15] some specific features of exploitation [caste, ethnicity] as distinct from that in a metropolitan country, impede the development of economic struggles of the workers and in consequence retard the growth of their class political consciousness (Sen, 1977, p. 87, quoted in Chakrabarty, 1988).

The central concern of Marxist historians was to look for class consciousness among workers (industrial workers) and find out reasons what inhibit the growth of such consciousness. They believed that increasing industrialisation would do away with consciousness associated with

[15] Although this discussion revolves around the historical developments in the colonial context, its central argument that caste and other community-based identities trump class and class-based consciousness is dominant in the literature on class struggle in India. Chibber (2013) discusses this point extensively in his critique of postcolonial theory and its contextualisation in India.

caste, religion and ethnicity and pave way for the emergence of class consciousness. Das Gupta in a self-critical note observes that Marxist scholarship has been a believer in the argument that "the working of a process of homogenisation of labour and the linear view of a progression of class struggle and class consciousness from lower to higher and to still higher levels, ultimately reaching a crescendo of revolutionary and socialist struggle and consciousness" (Das Gupta, 1996, p.77). In short, it was assumed by these historians that an acceleration of industrialisation would lead to a linear movement of class struggle and consciousness and pre-capitalist identities would be replaced by class identity and consciousness.

This view was challenged by Dipesh Chakrabarty, a leading member of the *SS* school of historiography. While the *SS* school's dominant concern was to study peasant politics and consciousness in colonial India, Chakrabarty studied the jute workers in colonial India (Chakrabarty, 1988; 1989). In these influential works, he examined class consciousness among jute workers in colonial Calcutta, who were living in a society deeply embedded in pre-capitalist culture. Chakrabarty writes:

> the way that the category of 'class consciousness' is commonly employed in Marxist histories of Indian working classes is one that produces little or no understanding of 'culture' and its relationship to such consciousness...the issue is not one of information or lack of research ...it is rooted in the very theory of history." (1988, p. 21).

Chakrabarty argues that caste, religion, language and "other ties of birth" constitute some of the enduring features of political culture in modern India. The problem in Marxist historiography, according to Chakrabarty, is the question of transition from non-class consciousness to class consciousness and this can be achieved through heightened

industrialisation which will ultimately dissolve different forms of community-based consciousness among workers (Chakrabarty, 1988, pp. 25-26). According to Chakrabarty, Marxist historians assume that, in effect, workers all over the world, irrespective of their specific cultural pasts, *experience* capitalist production in the same way (1988, p. 29; italics in original). Alternatively, non-Western societies experience industrialisation differently than Western societies, and in non-Western societies, culture plays the dominant role in shaping consciousness and not just economic relations.

In his words "culture, one might say, is the 'unthought' of Indian Marxism" (Chakrabarty, 1989, p. xii). And he identifies this culture as the absence of 'bourgeois notion of equality and individuality.' Instead, what separate countries like colonial India from the industrialised West are the deeply rooted community ties of various kinds. How does this play an important role in differentiating collective action based on class from that of community ties? Chakrabarty explains that collective action by workers is marked by an inherent duality. A strike had always the potential to become a source of conflict among workers along religious lines and a religious riot contained the necessary element of rebellion against authority. He states that political-economic explanation based on the logic of capital is insufficient to understand this phenomenon and an acknowledgement of the essential role culture plays in the formation of such a duality must be taken into account.

The attempt to undermine the role of capitalistic social relations in workers' lives and their collective action has been subjected to a critique by Bagchi (1990) and Chandavarkar (1994,1997) among others. Bagchi (1990) states that for Chakrabarty pre-capitalist culture is a static element which remains unchanged despite changes in the forces and relations of production, and in this case, the imperatives of colonialism. Furthermore, Chakrabarty dismisses any discussion of the living conditions of workers as irrelevant to the constitution or reproduction of their consciousness as mere 'economics' or 'political economy.' An

elaborate critique can be seen in the works of Chandavarkar (1994,1997) who studied workers in the textile mills in Bombay during inter-war (1919-1939) period. He argues that for Chakrabarty, India remains an eternal Orientalist culture characterised by hierarchy which is immune to changes of any kind. Closely allied to this culture is pre-capitalist character which is identified not by an examination of the production relations of Bengal, but by the absence of the properties of capitalism which comprised the historical experience of late eighteenth-and nineteenth century England. These pre-capitalist relationships are identified by the absence of the notions of citizenship, individualism, equality before the law, and the formal freedom of contract (Chandavarkar, 1997). While trying to raise culture and experience and its importance in the formation of class consciousness, Chakrabarty ends up completely undermining the historical importance of capitalism and colonialism in the formation of class consciousness.

In his call to pay attention to cultural traditions as a formative influence in the production of workers' knowledge of the workplace, Chakravarty comes quite close to proposing the "ideological autonomy" of the worker despite his/her material incorporation in the process of production (Nair, 1993). Nair argues in her study of miners in the goldfields of Mysore renegotiated the workplace through actions which might sometimes be mediated through culture but not completely defined by cultural experience. In order to avoid what Chakrabarty thinks to be the 'foul smell of economism' (Palmer, 1990, p. 115) he falls into the trap of essentialising culture as an unchanging entity. Brass (2019) makes a trenchant critique of the theoretical premise and framework of the SS project-in which Chakrabarty's work is located-by arguing that the project's emphasis on 'cultural difference' and 'otherness' (caste, community and religious identities in India) converges with populist and nationalist ideology in the developing countries (p. 177). He further argues that 'grassroot agency' and 'voices from the below'- common usage in the SS project and postcolonial theory-are not

necessarily progressive and potentially contain regressive ideas hindering the growth of revolutionary politics.[16]

In the context of caste and its embeddedness in class, Singh (2002) notes that the most notable feature of the SS epistemology is the absence of class, without which it is not possible to understand peasant movements in India (p. 103). Furthermore, understanding caste in religious terms (as per the SS project) misses the dynamics of caste and land relations and reproduces the Orientalist logic about India culture as peculiar and (religious) community-centric (Singh, 2002, 2014). Extending this critique to working class politics, Isaac (1988) in a study on coir workers in Alleppey- a part of the province of Kerala in southern India-in the pre-independence period argued that it was possible to make a transition from old caste-based kinship ties to class consciousness. Noting that coir workers were leading a compartmentalised life between the factory and living spaces, with the former being characterised by wage relations while the latter was characterised by the deep-rooted caste-based community ties. The workers were engaged in both militant trade union movement inside the factory along with conflicts along the lines of caste and religion outside of the factory. Class solidarity was confined to factory life, while in the larger social world caste and community ties dominated the lives of workers (Isaac, 1985, p. 9). However, the economic struggles in the industry could not be resolved within the framework of caste. Most of the coir manufacturers were from the Ezhava caste which used to recruit workers from its own community with the assumption that if workers and owners belong to the same caste, industrial conflicts could be avoided. This proved to be a false hope as the coir workers were realising that their economic interest ran counter to their social affinities. Class conflict gradually replaced caste-based solidarities as struggles for increase in wages raged. Two factors were crucial in the emergence of class solidarity among coir workers. First, workers

[16] The rise of popularity of the SS project in India coincided with the rise of Hindu right-wing politics and this is an example of ideas and practical politics feeding into each other.

realised that there existed an economic inequality between them and the employers which was reflected in their poor living conditions. Second, the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) played a significant role in raising the class consciousness of workers through cultural activities of enacting plays highlighting the exploitative relation between the rich and the poor. Influenced by the developments in the Soviet Union, the basic principles of Marxism were serialised in popular form in the union meetings and its news bulletin. Gradually the Congress Socialist Party (CSP)[17] began organising among the coir workers and regular discussions on socialist theory were organised for the workers outside of factory premises. A combination of these two factors helped workers make a transition from caste consciousness to class consciousness (Isaac, 1985, p. 12). As a result, the argument that in Indian society, primordial identities like caste always trump class consciousness was seriously questioned.

The scholarship on working class in post-colonial India focussed on trade union struggles with scant attention paid to class consciousness of workers in these struggles. Collective bargaining, multiple unionism, and the role of the state became the dominant themes around which the labour scholarship revolved (Bhowmik, 1996, 2012; Ramaswamy, 1977, 1984, 1988; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987). In recent times, the labour scholarship has moved away from a focus on the CTUs and collective bargaining to rank-and-file activism (Samaddar, 2015) and social movement unionism (Hammar, 2010; Nowak, 2020). Accounts of the limitations of company-based unionism and the effectiveness of social movement unionism in furthering workers' interest have been provided in these studies. The everyday life of labour has also attracted a lot of attention (Breman, 2004; De Neve, 2005; Holmstrom, 1976). Agarwala (2013) argues that informal workers struggled for their rights not as workers

[17] During the anti-colonial struggles in India, many radical organisations were influenced the Russian Revolution and Marxism. When the anti-colonial struggles reached their peak in the 1930s and 40s, revolutionary organisations discussed the economic developments in the Soviet Union and how it was possible for India to achieve the same by combining anti-colonial struggles with struggle for socialism. This objective, however, remained unfulfilled as the Indian National Congress-led freedom movement aligned with the national bourgeoisie and blunted the radical aspirations of masses.

but as citizens by making demands on the state. The failure of trade unions to build a cross-class alliance led to the decline of the trade union movement in India (RoyChowdhury, 2008). Sinha (2014) proposes that neoliberalism and the decline of Fordism and the industrial working class marks new phase of working class politics in India where class cannot be considered the main criterion to understand the politics of forest workers in Uttarakhand and Migrant construction workers from the province of Bihar. Forest workers fighting for their rights and migrant workers identifying themselves with their regional identity far outweighs the importance of class identity and consciousness. Sinha writes, '[while] work is the primary reason why Bihari workers have migrated in such large and increasing numbers, it is the case that the worker-identity and working-class consciousness of these groups holds far less valence than their *Bihariness*' (Sinha, 2014, p. 164).

Class consciousness is conspicuous by its absence in the strike literature barring a few exceptions (Patel, 1994, 1997; Parry & Ajay, 2020). Workers overcame status-based differences (caste and regional identity) because of mutual solidarity and hostility towards the employers in a pharmaceutical company within and outside the plant and engaged in a strike with the demands of recognition of their union and state intervention to settle their disputes (Patel, 1997, p. 32). Moreover, the trade unions, their ideology and legitimacy of the leadership played a crucial role in mobilising workers and enabling them to transcend their occupational divisions and parochial loyalties. Presenting a contrasting picture, Parry and Ajay note that anger against the management cannot be considered as an expression of class consciousness because the workers do not identify the management as a class antagonist. Even during a strike action, the ethnicity of workers inhibits the development of class consciousness (Parry & Ajay, 2020, p. 641).

The literature on landmark strikes in India ignored the significance of class consciousness and its impact on class struggle by workers. The Indian Railways strike in

1974 received some attention from scholars (Samaddar, 2015; Sherlock, 2001). Samaddar (2015) in his study on the famous railway strike in 1974, emphasises the emergence of a conflict between the leadership and the rank and file among the railways unions. Analysis of strikes in Bombay's textile mills remained confined to issues of multiple unionism and cult-like status of union leaders (Bakshi, 1986; Bhattacharya, 1981; Wersch,1992). Nair (2009) offers a similar narrative in the context of mining workers' struggles in Chhattisgarh in the 1990s, when the *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha* (Chhattisgarh Liberation Front) (CMM) led by charismatic trade unionist Shankar Guha Niyogi struck against the state-led mining corporations. The auto workers' strikes since the early twenty first century has led to discussions on autonomy of workers' struggle and emergence of a new militant working class (Nair & Friedman, 2017; Ness, 2016; Nowak, 2020; Sen, 2016). This literature focused on wildcat strikes and spontaneous militant action by workers, but ignored the question of class consciousness and its impact on the forms of workers' struggle.

Section 2.5 Gaps in the Literature and an Alternative Theoretical Framework

The literature on class consciousness provides many insightful theoretical and empirical that political thinkers and scholars have made. Some gaps, however, remain.

First, the Marxist framework outlines the broader conceptual apparatus to understand class consciousness and its transformative impact on social transformation. However, this framework has some limitations. Marx and Engels laid down a general formulations of class consciousness as a subjective and conscious realisation of objective material conditions, but were limited in their conceptualisation because of several historical developments. The working class was not developed and the pattern of popular revolutions was mainly artisanal rather than proletarian. The revolutionary effort of Paris Commune in 1871 was confined to one city. The trade unions were just developing and there was no communist political

organisation to represent the working class (Barker, 1996, pp. 3-4). The historical experience of reformist and sectional nature of trade union struggles, the important role that communist (and socialist) political parties played in raising the consciousness of workers was not available to Marx and Engels. Marx and Engels laid down the general formulations on class consciousness, but the concrete ways in which the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself was to be achieved remained undertheorised. Idealism characterised Lukacs' theory of imputed consciousness, and as Fracchia (2013) states, Lukacs underscored the significance of subjective element of class consciousness, but argued that not even the most revolutionary of workers could achieve (imputed) class consciousness. It is the party armed with revolutionary theory that is capable of achieving this consciousness. This argument undermines the role of working class and ignores a dialectical interaction between the working class and the party. However, the two concepts-class-for-itself (Marx) and imputed consciousness (Lukacs)-achieve an important theoretical task: they provide us with a parameter against which existing levels of consciousness are evaluated, beyond their immediacy.

Lenin grounded his theory of consciousness in the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness through a contradictory interaction between working class self-activity and a political organisation imbued with a scientific knowledge of capitalism, which for him is represented by Marxism. By assessing each movement in a struggle from a perspective of what Lukacs calls "the actuality of the revolution" Lenin laid down a framework in which the immediate movement is constantly examined from the perspective of the end goal (which itself is not static) (Lukacs, 1970, pp. 9-10). Lenin argued that on its own the working class is capable of achieving trade union consciousness through spontaneous action, but cannot achieve class consciousness which has to be brought from the outside which Shandro (1995) refers to as "consciousness from without." Although Lenin rightly pointed out the necessity for a political organisation, the historical and political conditions of his time prevented him

from grasping the full import of outside intervention in class struggle. In contrast to the autocratic regime in which Lenin operated, the prevalence and further embeddedness of democratic political systems (in their formal and limited sense) provides for the existence of multiple political parties, including communist parties and their affiliated trade unions. The form of intervention and involvement of these political organisations in working class struggles ranges from outright pro-capitalist to reformist orientations with the potential to take working class consciousness on a regressive path or a reformist path. Although Lenin discussed the ways to combat spontaneity through political intervention, the nature of this intervention assumed the existence of a political party hegemonic enough to successfully participate and lead the working towards a higher form of consciousness and consequently, revolutionary transformation. Das (2017, pp. 428-431) outlines different stages of class consciousness ranging from embryonic consciousness, spontaneity, trade union consciousness in its economic and political forms and class consciousness, and terms these different stages as "stadiality of consciousness." The transition from one form to the other (higher) form involves a combination of self-activity and political intervention. This transition, however, is not unilinear. Also, the possibility of a decline of consciousness exists which Lenin did not have the occasion to develop further.

While Lenin talked about the movement from spontaneity to class consciousness, Gramsci underscored the need to understand the contradictory character of common sense of the working class which is fragmented and contains multiple elements: workers' own sense of the objective conditions and internalisation of hegemonic ideas. Explaining the relation between thought and action, Gramsci considered action more radical than thought because the latter is steeped in common sense, and hence subject to hegemonic domination. The dialectical relation between thought and action, however, remains underdeveloped. The radical nature of one part of the couplet (action and thought) is not fixed but fluid and

depends on the constrains within which each of these two elements operate. Furthermore, the history of working class movements clearly show that revolutionary ideas have had transformative impact on collective action. Moreover, Gramsci does not critically examine the nature of common sense, although he highlights its multiple meanings and fragmentary character. As Sayer pointed out, common sense holds assumptions about social life which reproduces the status quo and expression of an ideology (ruling class) (Sayer, 1979, pp. 20-21, cited in Cox, 1996, p. 1), and common sense of this kind has an inhibiting impact on the development of class consciousness which Gramsci fails to account for while discussing contradictory consciousness and the apparent radical nature of action in contrary to more conservative and status quoist thought.[18]

Second, the literature on strike and class consciousness overwhelmingly focuses on the impact of strikes on workers' consciousness. It ignores the nature of consciousness after the strikes subside, either through force and state intervention (judicial verdicts, back to work legislation) or when a compromise is reached between workers and the employers. Moreover, the impact of the specific nature of class consciousness on the form of strikes is ignored. For instance, strikes could take the form of wildcat, operate within a set of institutional mechanisms, or assume a more general character and spread beyond its immediate moment of origin. Different forms of class consciousness is central to each of these forms of strikes; neglecting an analysis of this consciousness in relation to strikes leads to teleological acceptance that strikes are confined to the immediate economic struggles in a plant or an industry. Scholars on strikes have pointed out how strikes advance consciousness and under certain circumstances (lack of solidarity, an established union, older industrial region) consciousness declines both during the strikes and after strikes end. Advance and decline are

[18] This reading of Gramsci is based on his exposition of common sense in the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.* His other empirical writings during his involvement with factory council movements have not been taken into account in this dissertation.

not two separate elements, but dialectical parts of class consciousness. The decline in consciousness is not automatic and linear, but is mediated by ideology, organisation and capitalist restructuring and state interventions. These mediating practices are ignored in the literature.

Third, there is a tendency in the literature on class consciousness in India to counterpose the existence and consciousness of non-class identities with class consciousness. The *Subaltern Studies* project championed this view which has been a dominant scholarly framework to understand class consciousness India. Despite criticisms of the *SS* project, social identities such as caste, religion, ethnicity, and regional identity undermine the emergence of a consciousness based on class solidarity. Scholars have challenged this view (Patel, 1994; Isaac, 1985) that identity based-consciousness can be overcome in situations of collective action by the working class. However, the transformative impact of capitalism on social identities (caste, religion, ethnicity, gender) and social spaces (agrarian landscape) has not generated much debate. As Chibber (2013, 2022) observes, non-class identities do not disappear in the face of capitalist expansion, but are incorporated into the structure to serve the interests of capital accumulation. In this process of incorporation non-class consciousness is invoked and created in ingenious ways to break solidarity on the basis of class consciousness. Furthermore, occupational hierarchy, the functioning of the state at different scales, and trust or lack thereof in the political system and its representatives impacts class consciousness of the working class which is not solely guided by non-class relations.

Fourth, scholars have not paid enough attention to the relation between state and class consciousness The development of the state is an essential aspect of the development of class struggle. In reproducing itself capital also reproduces a working class which is not always passive, but also creates barriers to the continued reproduction of capitalism. It is the state which plays a significant role in overcoming these barriers (Clarke, 1991, pp. 190-193). The

working class is always the subject of state power because of its class character that is represented by its material and political subordination to capital (Clarke, 1991, p. 198). In a similar vein, Saccarelli (2020) highlights the role of coercion in a hegemonic political regime and these coercive practices and mechanisms are implemented by the state through various institutions. While the role of the state in class struggle has been examined, its impact on class consciousness has not received scholarly examination. Althusser (2006) makes a compelling argument that the reproduction of capitalism is not possible without the existence and intervention of state ideological apparatuses. The state shapes working class consciousness by imposing limitations on class struggle through laws and through coercive instruments which puts limits on the potentiality of class struggle. Repressive intervention by the state creates a feeling of common interests by the working class and a common enemy. Workers do realise the antagonism with the employers, but this realisation intensifies when they *recognise* the partiality of the state institutions and the ideology disseminating institutions such as the media. The recognition of this partiality is crucial for class consciousness among the strikers (Kelly, 1988, pp. 122-127; italics added). The class consciousness literature has ignored the consciousness-shaping role of the state, and subsequently, its impact on class struggle.

The discussion on trade union struggles including strikes have taken a spatial turn with the burgeoning field of labour geography that highlights how workers shape the economic landscapes and assert their agency in the production of economic geographies (Herod, 1997; Mitchel, 2011). Much of this work has focused its attention on trade union organisation and on the ways workers engage in place-based struggles to improve their material conditions (Bridi, 2013; Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2010; Tufts & Savage, 2009;). Labour geographers have identified newer areas of research that require further empirical research on workers' struggles in places and at scales that go beyond conventional focus on organised

labour and a spatial privileging of the western societies (Castree, 2007; Raj-Reichert, 2023, Strauss, 2020). While space has been accorded its due significance in the labour geography literature, class consciousness has been treated as a given category instead of being analysed as a category that has significant impact on working class agency and collective action. Drawing on insights from Marx and Engels' work on urbanisation, Goonewardena (2004) highlights how urban space makes certain social classes politically self-conscious. This process of becoming self-conscious, or becoming class conscious is not automatic. A number of factors play significant roles in this process including past struggles, the ideology of organisations operating in a particular space, and workers' own common sense. Spatiality of consciousness which also takes into account these mediating factors has received little critical attention in the labour geography literature.

Thus, responding to the gaps in the literature and drawing upon the existing literature, I have identified three elements that should form the basis for a dialectical understanding of class consciousness.

First, working class consciousness is shaped by objective material conditions and subjective response to these conditions based on the history of class struggle in a space, and its impact on place-based struggles.

Second, a dialectical relation between class consciousness and class struggle exists wherein class consciousness shapes the nature of class struggle, and in turn, gets shaped by the form of the latter in course of its movement which is mediated by the state, trade unions, and workers' self-activity.

Third, the advance and decline of class consciousness is a contradictory process, and hence unilinear. The response to class struggle by the state, capital and working class organisations (who intermittently participate in class struggle) determine the nature of class consciousness.

State intervention at multiple geographical scales plays a crucial role in shaping class consciousness. This intervention is not a one-off event, but takes multiple forms: coercion, production of a discourse, judicial interventions, and political communication through elected representatives. Furthermore, capital's response to a conscious and assertive working class and ideology of the working class organisations impact working class consciousness, both in its reformist as well as radical form.

Chapter 3

The Political Economy of the Auto Industry in India

3.1 Introduction

The auto industry in India has grown enormously in recent decades. India is the fifth largest producer of automobiles, producing over 22 million vehicles in 2021 (IBEF, 2022). The current government in India has declared the industry as the foremost driver of its ambitious Make in India[19] programme in order to turn India into a manufacturing powerhouse with an ostensible goal of competing with China. Auto industry currently contributes 7.1 per cent to country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP),[20] 49 per cent of its manufacturing GDP, and provides jobs to over 30 million people. The Automotive Mission Plan (AMP) 2016-2026, prepared jointly by the Government of India (GOI) and the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), predicts that the industry will contribute over 12 per cent of the country's GDP and add 60 million jobs by 2026 (AMP 2016-2026, 2017). The industry has come a long way from operating in an economy characterised by Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) in a protected market to playing an important engine of growth and employment in an open economy with a highly competitive market. However, this is only a partial story of the industry. The growth of the industry since the economic reforms of the

[19] Make in India is an initiative by the Indian government to encourage and incentivise production and investment in the manufacturing sector with a goal to become self reliant and reduce dependence on import of products in 26 sectors including the auto industry, defense, pharmaceuticals, textile, space and astronomy etc. The provinces have launched similar initiatives. This initiative was clubbed with another programme called Ease of Doing Business in India with an aim to remove barriers for foreign capital to do business in India. These programmes have been criticized on the ground that they merely setting up plants in India does not change the existing structure of investment decisions and use of technology which is guided by the interests of corporations in the advanced capitalist countries (Patnaik, 2015).

[20] Industry contributes 25.9 per cent to the GDP while agriculture and service sectors contribute 53.9 and 20.2 respectively. In the industry sector, manufacturing contributes just below 17 per cent out of 25.9 per cent (The Economic Survey 2021-22, Government of India).

1990s and particularly since the early 2000s has coincided with labour conflicts because of increasing intensity in work, higher rate of contractualisation of jobs and low wages, and denial of basic trade union rights.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The auto industry operated in a context where the state played an important role in enabling industrial development. The first section briefly outlines the evolution of India's industrialisation trajectory since 1947 and the changes brought by the economic reforms of the 1990s. This is followed by a discussion of the evolution of the auto industry in India till the 1990s and the expansion of the industry following economic reforms carried out in the 1990s. The third section maps the spatial distribution of the industry, which primarily came up in regions with no prior industrial base. The fourth section examines the labour regime in the industry, which is divided between a small section of secure workers (in a limited sense) and a vast majority of contract workers. This is followed by a discussion on the nature of class struggle in the industry and across different regions. The concluding section will summarise the chapter and highlight some new trends in the industry.

3.2 The Political Economy of Industrialisation in post-colonial India

The blueprint for India's industrialisation policy was laid down in the years preceding India's independence. The National Planning Committee in 1939 formulated the broader policy of planned capitalist development based on import substitution industrialisation (ISI) (Chibber, 2003). A state-led capitalist development strategy was followed where the state played a significant role in developing what is called a 'mixed economy' with the public and private sector complementing each other (Chandrasekhar, 1994; Frankel, 2005; for an extensive review, see RoyChowdhury, 2013). The development strategy used a mixed economy approach, with the state creating a public sector. The Industrial Policy Resolution, 1948 and

1956 reserved fifteen sectors for the state. The Indian Development and Regulation Act, 1951 laid out the policy of industrial licensing which required the private sector to seek government's permission to carry out commercial activities. A policy making body called the Planning Commission was set up to formulate broader guidelines on India's capitalist development (Frankel, 2005). This policy of state-led industrialisation continued even after the death of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The role of the state was further consolidated after Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP), 1969 and Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FEMA), 1974 were enacted. While the former Act placed stringent regulations against concentration of economic power to common detriment, the latter Act restricted equity participation in an Indian firm to 40 per cent. The central government led by Indira Gandhi nationalised sectors such as steel, copper, banking, and insurance in the 1970s (Das Gupta, 2016; Frankel 2005; Gupta, 1989).

The industrial policies gradually changed in the 1980s when the requirement of license was waived for several industries and the restrictive MRTP Act was liberalised. Industries such as automobile, pharmaceutical, and telecommunications and electronics were gradually deregulated in the 1980s (D Costa 2005, Kohli, 2005; Pingle, 1999). But the major change in the industrial policy came with the economic reforms in 1991, when policies of liberalisation and privatisation were implemented. In response to a balance of payments (BoP) crisis and decline in reserves of foreign currency, the economy was opened to private capital and the previous strategy of state-led capitalist development was abandoned (Ahluwalia, 2007; Bhaduri & Nayyar, 1996). The foreign exchange crisis triggered by the second Gulf War between Iraq and Kuwait forced India to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for conditional lending. Out of several changes in policies to meet the conditions laid down by the IMF, India liberalised its tariff policy by reducing import duties and devalued its rupee which allowed for easier entry of foreign capital to India. The FERA

Act was replaced with a trade regime that allowed up to 51 per cent of equity investment in several sectors including the auto industry. The private sector was allowed to expand its role in manufacturing and provisions were made for integration of Indian firms into global supply chains. The sectors reserved for the public sector were reduced substantially, and only defence and sectors of strategic importance were reserved for the public sector. The manufacturing of consumer goods industries was placed in the domain of the private sector (Joshi & Little 1996). The dominant discourse around these economic reforms centred around an increase in growth rate and reduction in poverty; it was believed that once the markets were opened and the state took a back seat, the benefits of economic growth would trickle down to the bottom of the society (Ahluwalia, 2002; Bhagwati. 2001; Panagariya, 2008). This optimism was questioned by Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2002) who argued based on the experience of a decade of economic reforms that the market has failed to make a dent in poverty despite the claims made by the proponents of the reforms. Similarly, Patnaik (2000) argued that the reforms initiated a process of easier movement of finance capital in and out of India, and this easy movement substantially reduced the state's capacity to work in favour of the poor.

The policy makers were undeterred by the criticisms and India's industrialisation continued to operated within the framework laid down by the economic reforms. To promote export growth and reduce state intervention in industries, a Special Economic Zone Act was passed in 2005. An SEZ is a geographic region with a separate legal framework providing for liberal economic policies and governance arrangements from that prevailing in the country. The purpose was to attract large volumes of investment by providing world-class infrastructural facilities, a favourable taxation regime and incentives for sectoral clustering (Jenkins, 2011, p. 50). Faster economic growth and creation of more employment opportunities were cited as major reasons for setting up the SEZs which could be developed

by private promoters as well as provincial governments. Restrictions on the implementation of labour laws is a significant feature of the SEZs (Singh, 2009). Although inspired by the Chinese experience of SEZs, the Indian framework for SEZs is different on several accounts. Currently, 265 SEZs are operational while 378 SEZs have been notified (PIB, March 10, 2021). Under the National Manufacturing Policy (NMP), 2011, the government established 'National Investment and Manufacturing Zones' (NIMZ) to reduce logistics and transportation costs and create industrial hubs with high quality infrastructure (DIPP, 2011). While the SEZs housed multiple industries, the NIMZs are designed for specific sectors such as petrochemicals, garments and apparel production.

The current government led by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) declared a policy of Make in India programme in 2014, to promote manufacturing and industrial activities in India. The major sectors which the government sought to promote are automobiles, aviation, chemicals, electrical machinery, and defence manufacturing.[21] The idea behind this policy was to make India a manufacturing powerhouse like China and to attract foreign investment and private capital. Apart from offering concessions to private capital like raising the bar for equity investment to 100 per cent in several sectors, including the defense and strategic sectors,[22] the government made substantial changes in the labour laws. The existing labour laws were amalgamated into four labour codes which have been passed by the parliament in 2021. It has been a long-standing demand of industrial organisations, economic think tanks and policy makers to liberalise India's labour laws to promote economic growth, especially in the manufacturing sector (Roychowdhury, 2019). The rationale for introducing more flexibility to the hire and fire rules of the existing labour laws to promote growth has been disputed by scholars (Deakin & Sarkar, 2011; Vijaybhaskar, 2015). The change in policies is being promoted as major steps to attract investment in India

[21] For a list of sectors under the Make in India programme, see makeinindia.com/sectors
[22] These sectors were reserved for the state as they were considered sectors of national importance.

unencumbered by supposedly ‘rigid’ labour laws with complete disregard for labour rights and well being. The auto industry in India is operating in this broader context of a neoliberal market economy with a competitive domestic market, pro-market interventions by the state, and emergence of a precarious workforce whose rights are going to further endangered by the new labour laws.

3.3 Evolution and the spatiality of the Auto Industry in India

Automobiles were introduced in colonial India in 1898. Cars and heavy vehicles were imported from Europe and the USA by British officials, Indian Princely families, and prominent industrialists such as Tata, Birla, and Hirachand. General Motors (GM) and Ford entered the Indian market in the 1920s and 30s. General Motors began assembling completely knocked down trucks and cars in Mumbai in the early 1930. During the same period, Ford established similar assembling units Madras and Bombay and a year later in Calcutta (Pingle, 1999, pp. 86-7). The Birlas set up Hindustan Motors (HM) and the Walchand Group set up Premier Automobiles (PA) in the 1940. The Tatas set up their automobile manufacturing and assembly plant Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO) in Jamshedpur in 1945. Commercial vehicles were produced following collaboration with Daimler-Benz in 1954. Ashok Motors and Mahindra and Mahindra entered the market in 1948 and 1949 respectively. The industry relied on assembling imported components rather than manufacture automobiles (Pingle, 1999, p. 87).

The first Industrial Policy Resolution passed in 1948, specified the role of the state in industrial development. The Resolution divided industrial units into two categories. The first category comprised industries which were reserved for the exclusive monopoly of the state. The second category covered industries in which private enterprise was permitted, although regulated and controlled by the state. The auto industry was included in this category. The

1951 Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act specified the manner of state regulation over industries. Under this Act, all automobile companies were required to obtain a license for establishing a new unit, manufacturing a new automobile product, increasing production capacity, and changing the location of an existing plant. While policy changes were introduced periodically, the overall process was maintained between 1951 and 1993 (Pingle, 1999, p. 88). In line with objectives of the Industrial Policy Resolution 1948, the Ministry of Industry presented India's first automobile policy in 1949. To encourage domestic manufacture of automobiles, the state banned import of all fully built vehicles. Automobile firms engaged in assembling vehicles from completely-knocked-down units were, however, permitted to operate (D Costa, 2005, pp. 81-2; D Costa, 2011; Pingle, 1999, p. 89). GM and Ford closed their operations in the country rather than establish plants for domestic manufacture. This led Premier Automobiles and Hindustan Motors, which had this far assembled commercial vehicles, to enter the protected passenger car segment.

By the mid-1950s, the manufacturing programs of five automobile companies were approved. Besides PA and HM, Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M), Ashok Motors (AM), and TELCO were granted licenses. M&M manufactured Jeeps, AM entered into a collaboration with Leyland to manufacture buses and trucks, and TELCO joined with Daimler-Benz to produce bus chasis and trucks. Throughout the 50s, the state continued to provide the automobile industry with a protected market. Foreign competition had been effectively eliminated by the mid-50s. Domestic competition was regulated via the licensing system. The state regulated competition within the country by enforcing licenses for new firms, existing ones' expansion, and product mix modification. Given that all firms depended on the import of components, the state could influence production rates via its control over foreign exchange allocation (Pingle, 1999, p. 91).

State control over the auto industry continued till the 1980, after which two major changes were introduced. Policies regarding the commercial vehicle segment (especially concerning the entry of new firms) were liberalised, and as a result, four new light commercial vehicle companies were set up. Second, a state-owned automobile manufacturing plant, Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL) was established with Japanese Collaboration. Of these two initiatives, the establishment of MUL led to fundamental changes in the industry's structure. All the four new entrants established plants with the help of foreign collaborations which involved both technical and financial agreements. (Pingle, 1999, p.105). The establishment of state-owned passenger car enterprise MUL with Japanese collaboration in 1983 altered the face of Indian automobile industry. The state played a major role in the initial expansion of the MUL by providing preferential treatment. Further, while PA and HM were prevented from increasing their production levels, and struggled with less than minimum economic scales of production, MUL, from the very beginning was licensed a production capacity that ensured economies of scale of production and efficiency (Pingle, 1999, p. 108).

In 1985 “broadbanding” was introduced. It did away with production license for a specific commodity and encouraged production of several other products. For instance, vehicle manufacturer thus could produce scooters, motorcycles, and three-and four-wheelers, introducing flexibility to use both economies of scale and economies of scope. Similarly, component manufacturers could produce a broad range of parts and related products. In 1985, even those automotive firms that came under the purview of MRTP were granted the freedom to expand capacity in existing plants or set up new units. Paradoxically, after a burst of opening up, the production of passenger cars throughout the 1980s and early 1990s remained tightly regulated and controlled through industrial licensing. No other new car manufacturers were permitted until after the reforms of 1991, even though several joint-ventures were

permitted under the LCV segment. The reasons were both political and economic-to protect MUL and save foreign exchange (D Costa, 2005, pp. 83-4).

With the entry of MUL the structure of the Indian car market changed perceptibly. Until the 1960s, there were three producers of cars, HM, PA and Standard Motors Private Ltd. (SMP), each with very small output. M&M produced utility vehicles. These producers initially licensed foreign technologies from the UK, USA and Italy. With increased local content under the phased manufacturing programme, they produced essentially indigenous vehicles. By the 1970s, HM and PA formed a duopoly in the car industry while M&M was a monopoly in utility vehicles. In 1984, two years after it was established, MUL manufactured over 12,000 cars, mainly from imported completely knocked down (CKD) kits. In 1990, MUL produced over 50 per cent of all passenger vehicles produced in India. (D Costa 2005, p. 85). The collaboration between MUL and the Japanese car maker Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) boosted the market share and production capacity of MUL in the domestic market (D Costa 2005, p. 85).

The internationalisation of the Indian auto industry entailed joint-ventures with foreign multinationals. Some foreign companies have entered India without an Indian partner. For example, Hyundai of Korea in passenger cars and Volvo of Sweden in trucks have been wholly owned subsidiaries from the very beginning (D Costa, 2005, pp. 95-6). The economic liberalisation measures of the 1980s, accelerated by economic reforms in 1991, had a major impact on the auto-industry. By 1993, the last vestiges of industrial licensing were abolished for auto manufacturers. Automatic approval was granted to foreign manufacturers to invest up to 51 per cent of equity ownership in local operations (Becker-Ritterspach, 2009, p. 89). The 1991-93 policy change was followed by a range of foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) deciding to invest in joint venture assembly operations in different

regions of India. The table below (Table 1) provides mode of entry and collaboration of domestic players with foreign automakers.

Table 3.1: Mode of entry for key foreign OEMs in Indian auto manufacturing[23]

OEM	Year of Entry	Mode of entry	Current mode of operation
MSIL	1982	PSU Joint venture with SMC	Subsidiary of SMC
Hero MotoCorp	1984	Joint venture with Honda Motor Company (Japan)	Fully operated by Hero Group
HMSI	1984	Joint venture with Hero Group	Fully owned Subsidiary of Honda Motor Company
Yamah India	1985	Joint venture	Fully-owned subsidiary of Yamaha Motor Company
General Motors	1994	Joint venture with Hindustan Motors	Fully-owned subsidiary of General Motors (US)
Daimler	1994	Joint venture with Tata Group (India)	Fully-owned subsidiary of Daimler AG (Germany)
Ford	1995	Joint venture with Mahindra and Mahindra	Became fully-owned subsidiary of Ford Motor Company (US), exited India in 2022
Hyundai	1996	Fully-owned subsidiary of Hyundai Motor Company (South Korea)	Fully-owned by HMC

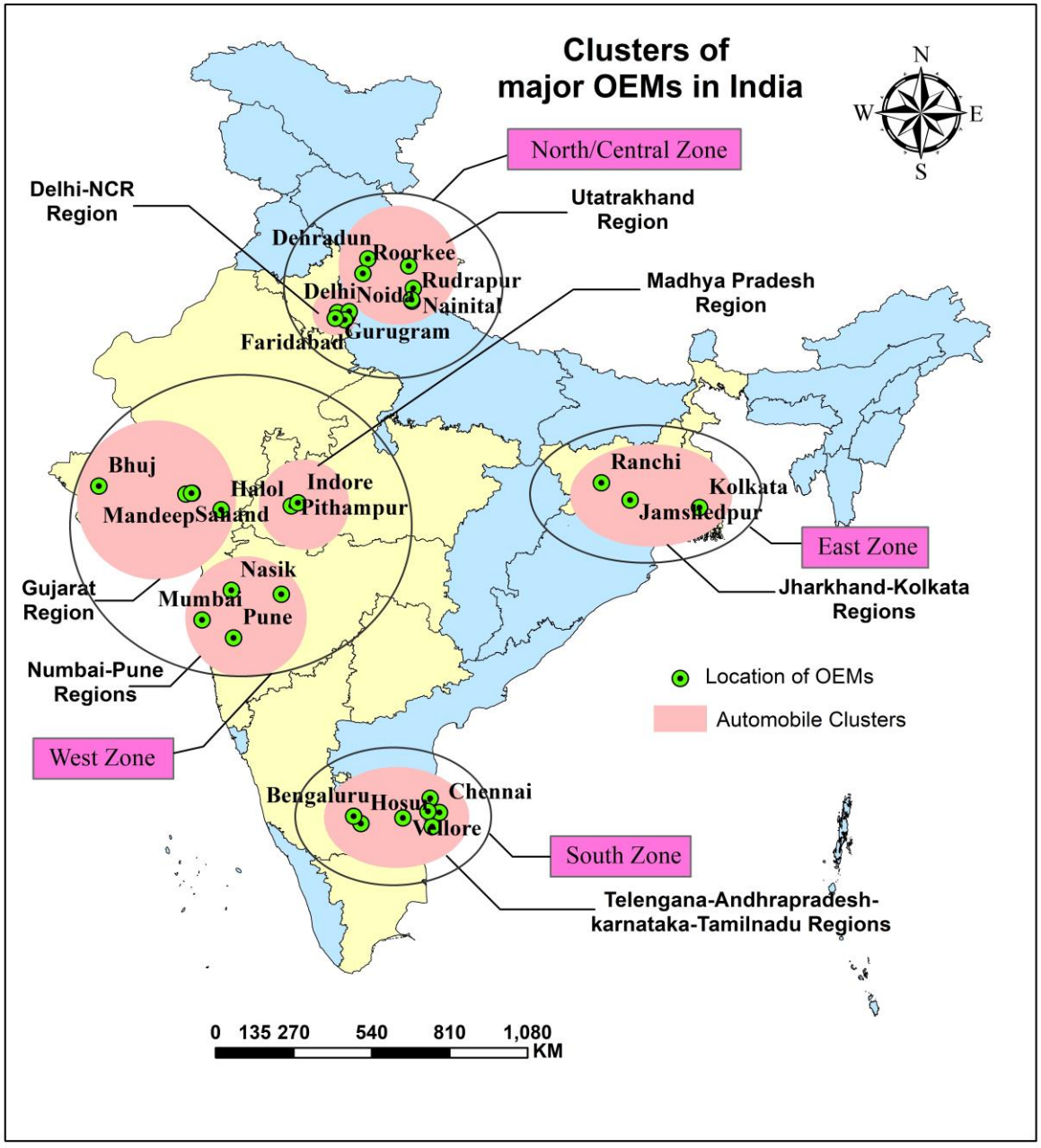
[23] The information from Barnes (2018) has been supplemented by recent newspaper reports on the new entrants in the Indian auto industry.

Fiat	1996	Joint venture with PAL	Joint venture with Tata Motors
Toyota Kirloskar	1997	Joint venture with Kirloskar Group	Joint venture with Kirloskar Group
Piaggio	1998	Joint venture with Greaves Cotton Limited	Fully-owned subsidiary of Piaggio (Italy)
Volvo India	1998	Fully-owned subsidiary of Volvo Cars (Sweden)	Fully-owned subsidiary of Volvo Cars
Skoda	2000	Fully-owned subsidiary of Volkswagen Group (Germany)	Fully-owned subsidiary of Volkswagen Group
BMW	2006	Fully-owned subsidiary of BMW (Germany)	Fully-owned subsidiary of BMW
Volkswagen	2009	Fully-owned subsidiary of Volkswagen Group	Fully-owned subsidiary of Volkswagen Group
Mercedes Benz	2009	Fully-owned subsidiary of Daimler AG	Fully-owned subsidiary of Daimler AG
Harley Davidson	2009	Fully-owned subsidiary of Harley Davidson (US)	Fully-owned subsidiary of Harley Davidson (US)
Renault-Nissan	2010	Joint venture between Renault and Nissan	Joint venture between Renault and Nissan
Kia India	2017	Fully-owned subsidiary of Kia Motors (South Korea)	Fully-owned subsidiary of Kia Motors
SAIC Motor	2019	Joint venture with MG Motor (UK)	Joint venture with MG Motor

Source: Barnes, 2018, pp. 93-4

Most global OEMs, and their Tier 1 suppliers, have established manufacturing operations in India (Barnes, 2018, p, 37). The OEMs and their suppliers have been established in clusters in different parts of India (See **Map 3.2**). The dominant clusters are Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), the Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) in Tamil Nadu, and the Chakan Special Economic Zone (C-SEZ) near Pune, Maharashtra. The Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) covers parts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. It is one of the most populated urban regions in India with a population of close to 50 million according to 2011 census report. Gurgaon is home to the first plant of MSIL (formerly MUL) and its supply chain. The second plant of MSIL is located in Industrial Model Town (IMT) Manesar which is adjacent to the city of Gurgaon. MSIL has opened a third plant in Sonipat, Haryana in 2021 which will start production in 2022-23 with a potential to manufacture one million passenger cars per year (The Economic Times, Aug 29, 2022). The industrial landscape of Gurgaon, Manesar, Dharuhera and Bawal is dominated by auto OEMs and their huge supply chain. In addition, they are part of the ambitious roadways infrastructure plan of Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) to create a manufacturing and industrial hub in India. It is one of the largest infrastructure projects in India. The satellite city of Faridabad also serves as a major hub for auto components manufacturing in the Delhi NCR. MSIL, Hero MotoCorp, Honda are the major OEMs in this region.

Map 3. 1 Clusters of Major OEMs in India



The CMA, the second largest hub of car production in the country, is located outside of Chennai, the capital of the province of Tamil Nadu. Apart from Chennai, the city of Sriperumbudur also serves as a major base for auto production. The South Korean auto maker Hyundai is located in the CMA. Other major automakers in the region are Renault-Nissan, and motorcycle manufacturer Royal Enfield. The German OEM, Daimler, runs a subsidiary truck and bus manufacturing plant known as Bharat Benz. BMW has a small manufacturing plant in the region as well. The C-SEZ is located in an industrial zone near the city of Pune. Several foreign OEMs have their production units located in this region including Skoda, Volkswagen and Mercedes Benz. The region also has major Indian automakers like M&M and market leader in two and three-wheeler vehicles Bajaj Auto. Other major automakers that operate in Pune are Tata Motors and Italian commercial vehicle manufacturer Piaggio and passenger vehicle maker Fiat.

Besides these clusters, two other regions are currently experiencing growth in automobile manufacturing. In Gujarat, Sanad and Halol have witnessed major manufacturers established their base lately. SMC's third plant is located in Hansalpur near Gujarat's capital, Ahmedabad. Tata Motors has a plant in Sanand and Hero MotoCorp has a plant in Halol. SAIC has opened a plant in Halol through its British subsidiary, MG Motors. The second emerging region is Haridwar and Pantnagar in Uttarakhand. Two Indian OEMs, Hero MotoCorp and M&M, are located in Haridwar. Bajaj Auto and Tata Motors have plants in Pantnagar. Toyota Kirloskar and TVS Motors are located in the outskirts of Bengaluru in Karnataka. The commercial heavy and light vehicles unit of Tata Motors is located in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand. Several auto components clusters are located around the city of Ludhiana in Punjab. New regions are going to emerge as major clusters in the coming year. South Korea automaker Kia Motors has opened its plant in Anantapur district, Andhra

Pradesh and seeks to build a supply chain in the region. Here is a list of major OEMs and their geographical location (Table 2).

Table 3.2: The geography of major OEMs in India

Delhi National Capital Region (NCR)	
Bawal, Haryana	Harley Davidson
Dharuhera and Gurgaon, Haryana	Hero MotoCorp
Faridabad, Haryana	Yamaha
Gurgaon, Manesar and Sonipat, Haryana	MSIL
Manesar (Haryana)and Tapukara (Rajasthan), Greater Noida	Honda
Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA), Tamil Nadu	
Chennai	Chrysler (Fiat), Daimler, Force Motors
Maraimala Nagar	BMW, Ford
Orgadam	Bharat Benz (Daimler), Renault-Nissan, Royal Enfield (Eicher)
Sriperumbudur	Hyundai
Tirvullur	Mitsubishi, Royal Enfield
Chakan Special Economic Zone (C-SEZ), Pune, Maharashtra	
Baramati	Piaggio
Chakan	Bajaj Auto, Force Motors, Mahindra

	and Mahinda, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagon/Skoda
Pimpri-Chinchawad	Jaguar/Landrover
Talegaon Dabhade	General Motors. SAIC
Ranjangaon	Fiat, Tata Motors
Gujarat	
Halol	General Motors, HeroMotoCorp
Sanand	Ford, Tata Motors
Vittalpur	Honda
Uttarakhand	
Haridwar	Hero MotoCorp, Mahindra and Mahindra
Pantnagar	Bajaj Auto, Tata Motors
Other states/locations	
Nalagarh, Himachal Pradesh	TVS
Jamshedpur, Jharkhand	Tata Motors
Bengaluru, Karnataka	Honda, Mahindra and Mahindra, REVA, Toyota Kirloskar, Volvo
Dharwad	Tata Motors
Mysore	TVS
Pithampur, Madhya Pradesh	Force Motors, Tata Motors, Volvo
Maharashtra (other than C-SEZ)	Chinkara Motors, Audi, Bajaj Auto, Mahindra and Mahindra, Tata Motors
Tamil Nadu (other than	TVS

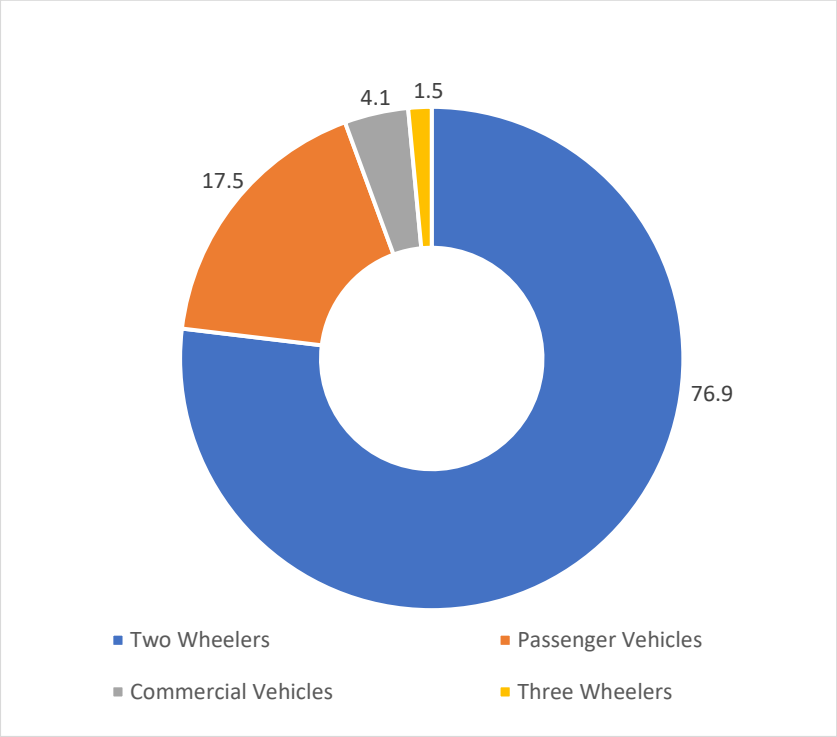
CMR), Hosur	
Telangana, Zaheerabad	Mahindra and Mahindra
Andhra Pradesh	Kia Motors

Source: Barnes, 2018, pp. 41-2

The role of state institutions was critical to MSIL's expansion and dominance in the region. At the provincial level, the Haryana government in collaboration with the central government provided land and other infrastructure facilities to MSIL in the 1980s. MSIL acquired 330 acres of industrial land from the Government of Haryana in Gurgaon. Through its public infrastructure investment arm-the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Cooperation (HSIIDC), the state government provided additional land at below market rates and channeled investment into major road, electricity and telecommunications infrastructure in the vicinity of its assembly operations (Government of Haryana, 2006, cited in Barnes 2018, p, 82). By the 1990s, most of MSIL's key components suppliers were based within 80 km of the Gurgaon Assembly site (Gulyani, 2001). In 1996, the HSIIDC sold 250 acres of land to MSIL to establish a specialist supplier park in IMT Manesar at below market price. In 2007, this site was transformed into Maruti's second assembly plant and an engine(power-train) manufacturing plant. (Barnes, 2018, p. 82). The assembly plants in Gurgaon and Manesar**,** the establishment of supply chain of over 200 Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III plants which supply the MSIL various auto components on the basis of just-in-time (JIT) principle established MSIL as a dominant industrial unit in the region and transformed Gurgaon from a rural district and administrative town to an industrial hub with hundreds of auto components plants employing thousands of workers (Becker-Ritterspach, 2009; D'Costa, 2005; Gulyani, 2001). Other state governments copied these policies in provinces like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. They built auto clusters around big car manufacturers.

The auto industry has come a long way along with India's capitalist development trajectory. The industry's contribution to the GDP stood at 2.77 percent in 1992-93 whereas currently the industry contributes 7.1 percent to the country's GDP (Ministry of Heavy Industries). The industry is dominated by two-wheelers followed by passenger vehicles and together these two segments account for more than 94 percent of market share. In the passenger car segment, small and mid-size cars dominate the market. For a segment wise distribution of different types of vehicles and their market share, see **Figure 3.1**.

Figure 3.1: Segment-wise domestic market share of vehicles in FY 2022

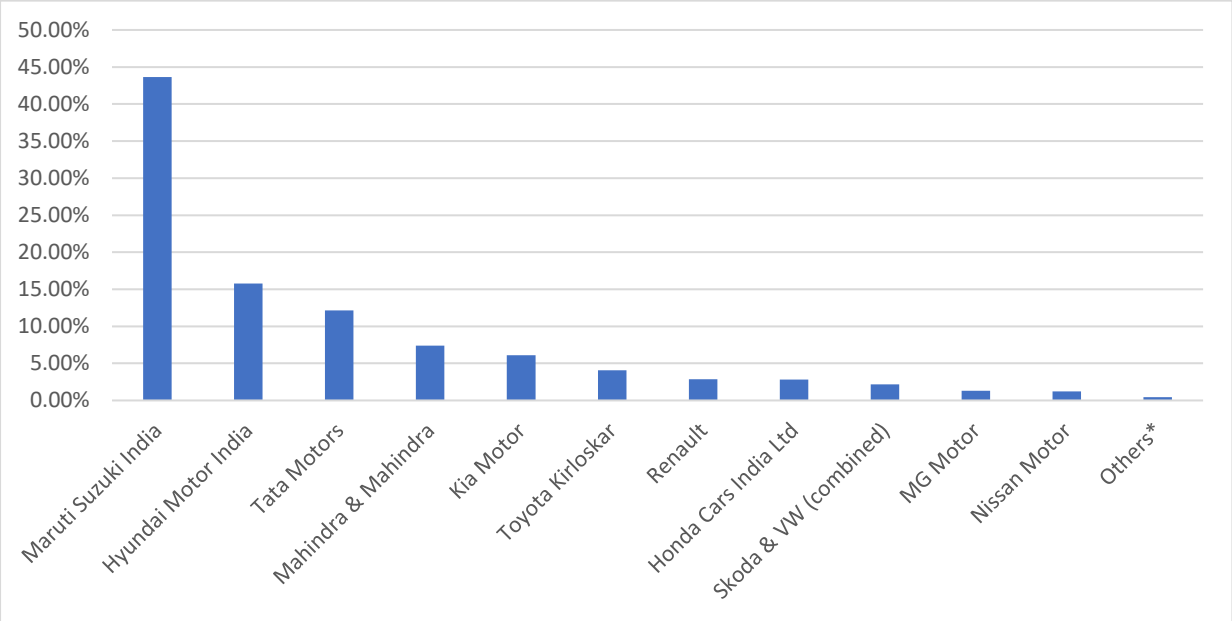


Source: India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), 2022

In the passenger car segment, MSIL is the largest player despite the entry of automakers such as Hyundai and Kia Motors. Tata Motors which dominated the commercial vehicles segment for a long time, has emerged as a major producer of passenger cars in the last decade. The figure below (**Figure 3.2**) shows market share of passenger cars of major auto makers in financial year (FY) 2022. Although the market share of MSIL has come down from more

than 50 percent in 2020 to less than 44 per cent in 2022, it retains the position as the largest carmaker in India (Khan, 2022).

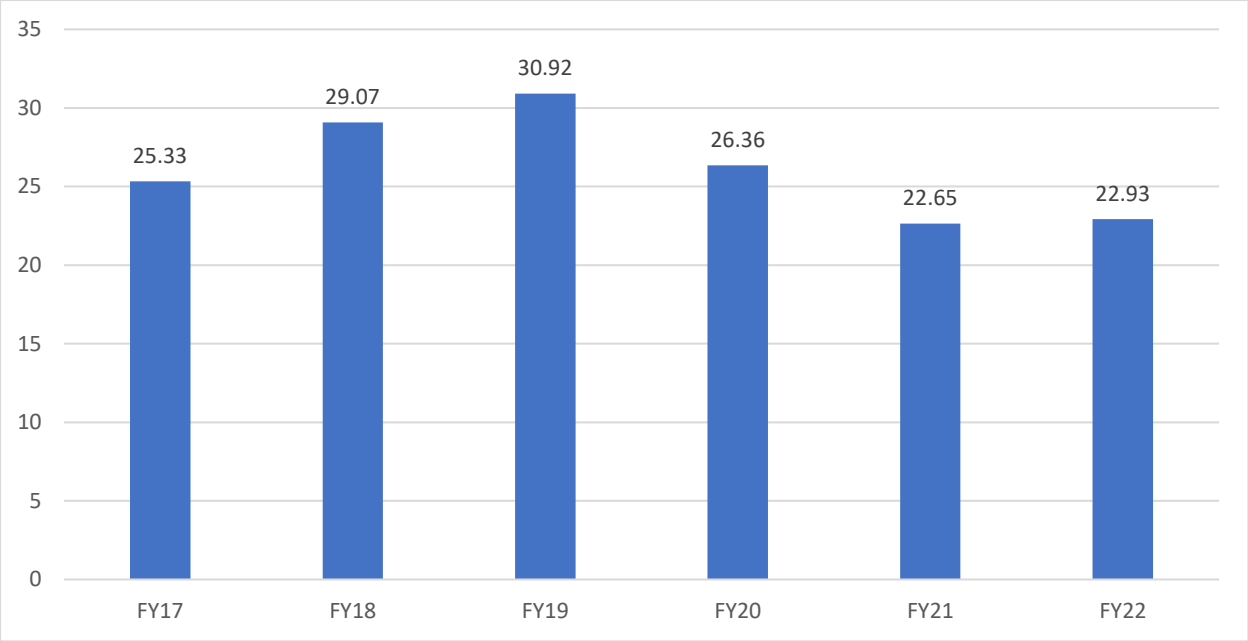
Figure 3.2: Passenger car market share of major auto makers in FY 2022



Source: Khan, 2022

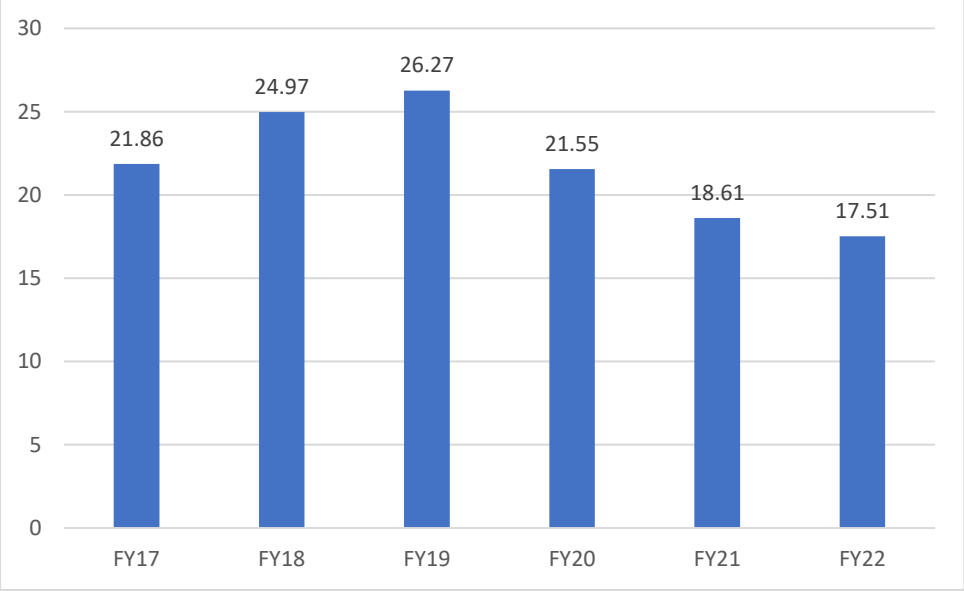
The production of automobiles has nearly hit the 23 million mark in 2022, as shown in **Figure 3.3**. India accounts for the majority of product usage, as illustrated in **Figure 3.4**, with exports making up a smaller share. Export of automobiles was not a major concern for the industry until early 2000. Export numbers are much lower than what is sold in India but have increased substantially since 2017. Countries in the Gulf region, South East Asia, Latin America and Africa are major markets for exports of vehicles produced in India (Bhatia, 2021; Mukherjee, 2022). In the passenger vehicles export segment (see **Figure 3.5**), MSIL is the largest player, followed by Hyundai and Kia Motors (Business Standard, April 18, 2022).

Figure 3.3: Number of automobiles produced in India (in million)



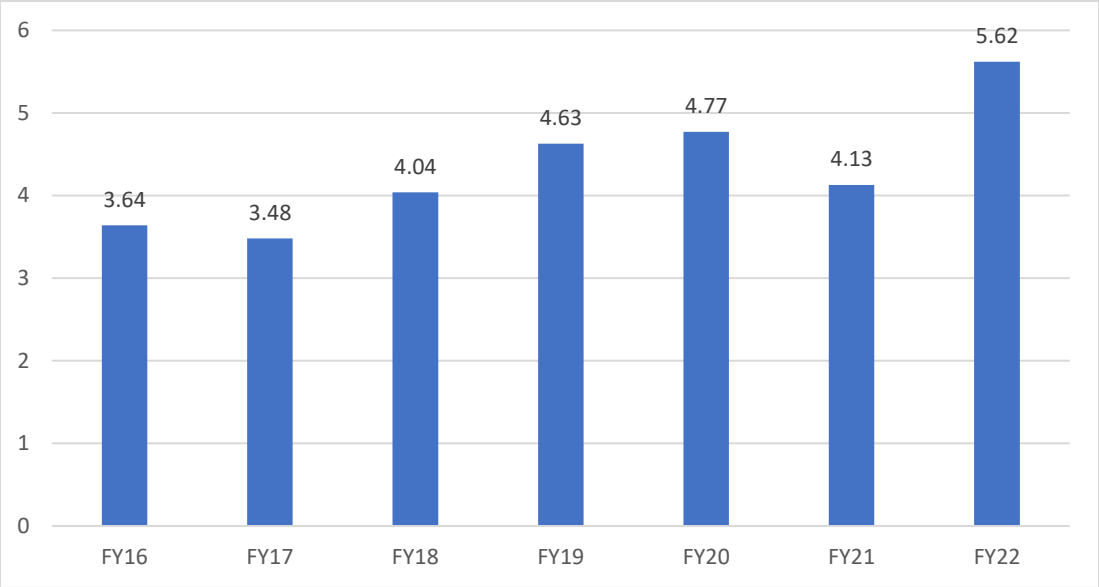
Source: SIAM, 2017-2022

Figure 3.4: Number of Automobiles sold in India (in million)



Source: SIAM, 2017-2022

Figure 3.5: Number of Automobiles exported (in million)



Source: SIAM, 2016-2022

The auto industry has come a long way from producing a few thousand vehicles per year in the 1950s to producing more than 22 million vehicles including passenger vehicles, commercial vehicles, two wheelers and three wheelers. Recently the national government has announced Production-linked Incentive Schemes (PLIS) to encourage the auto firms to increase production of components in India and reduce dependency on the import of crucial components. Aligned with this policy is the push for production of semi-conductors which play a pivotal in the auto industry. Separate budgetary allocations have been carved to promote a synchronic development of these two industries and establish linkages between them (Saxena, n.d). The government is also aggressively promoting production of e-vehicles to decrease on possible future reliance on China which is miles ahead in this field. The focus on the expansion of the industry, however, has not extended to ensuring better working conditions and wages for workers. The next section highlights the working conditions and

struggles of workers in the industry that promises to provide more than 50 million jobs by the end of 2030.

3.4 Contractualisation and Precarity

Job precarity and increasing contractualization of workers in the auto industry reflect the broader trends in the Indian economy. The 2020-21 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), prepared by the National Statistical Organisation (NSO) presents some worrying trends of employment and unemployment in India, and youth unemployment in particular. Currently, 40 per cent of the 1.41 billion population is in the labour force out of which 7.5 per cent of the labour is unemployed. It implies that around 42 million who are available for work are not employed. Within the unemployed category, the number of youth unemployment in the category which falls in the range of 15–29-year group, stands at 21 million (Chandrasekhar, 2022). While the PLFS data does not provide a separate category for educated unemployment in India, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reported that educated unemployment in India in 2021-2022 stands at 17.8 per cent up from 12 per cent in financial year 2016-2017 when annual PLFS surveys started (Benu & Kumar, 2022; Vyas, 2022). This figure for educated unemployment comes down to below 16 per cent after the post-pandemic economic recovery. However, this rate touches 42 per cent for graduates below 25 years of age (State of Working India 2023, 2023). When it comes to the nature of employment and secure jobs, the inequality is even more grim. Only 21 per cent of those employed are in regular employment with, and 23 per cent are causal labourers. The rest 56 per cent of the employed fall in the self-employed category. In the regular employment category, 64 per cent do not have job contracts, 48 percent not eligible for paid leave and 54 per cent not eligible for any social protection (Chandrasekhar, 2022). In the organised industrial sector, the number of contract workers has been on the rise in since early 1990s when economic reforms were introduced. The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) which specifically publishes

employment data for the industries, said in its 2013-14 report that the share of contract workers in the organised factory sector has increased from 12.26 per cent in 1990-91 to 42.27 per cent in 2013-14 (Shyam Sundar & Sapkal, 2017).

The reports do not provide separate data on the auto industry. Mainstream newspapers and industry organisations like FICCI and Assocham put the number of contract workers in the industry at more than 60 percent (The Economic Times, June 29, 2011). The labour regime in the Indian auto industry is dominated by a system of contractualisation. Non-enforcement of existing labour laws has been cited as a reason for an increase in the number of contract workers in the Indian manufacturing industry (Sharma, 2006; Saini, 2010). In addition, the state has contributed to the precarity of contract workers[24] by intervening on behalf of lead firms during labour disputes (Duvisac, 2018; Sood et al., 2014). Globally, lead firms in the auto industry have decreased in size and concentrate primarily on core activities such as design, research, product development, final assembly, and quality control because of moving away from mass production and adoption of lean production (Moody,1997; Humphrey, 2003; Okada, 2004; Zhang, 2008; Lee, 2011). The lead firms or the OEMs have a small minority of permanent workers and a majority of non-permanent/contract workers. However, the supply chain of Tier I, Tier II and Tier III firms are dominated by contract workers. The growth of the Indian auto industry has also coincided with the growth in the number of contract workers. While in the OEMs (MSIL, HMSI, Hero Honda, Hyundai, Tata Motors, M&M) contract workers constitute 50-60 per cent of the workforce, in the supply

[24] Skilled workers in the auto industry usually come from the state-run technical institutions called it is. The Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS) for training of skilled craftsmen is implemented through Govt. and Pvt. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). Duration of these training courses varies from 6 Months -2 Years duration, NSQF compliant courses in 138 Trades which includes 74 Engineering trades, 59 Trades in the Non-Engineering Sector and 05 courses for Persons with Disabilities (PwD). Currently, 23.15 Lakh persons are undergoing training in 14,491 ITIs (both Govt. & Pvt.). DGT has introduced the Dual System of Training (DST) model wherein the ITIs join hands with multiple industry partners for providing mandatory industrial exposure to the trainees during the course of their training. As a part of this model, auto-makers like MSIL and Hyundai have set-up Automobile Skill Enhancement Centres (ASEC) in different ITIs. https://dgt.gov.in/About_DGT

chain they constitute 80-90 per cent of the workforce and in some cases their number is over 90 per cent (Barnes et al., 2015). The increase in the number of contract workers is used to create and sustain a precarious workforce as well as control and discipline them (Moody, 1997). Moreover, contractualisation has negatively shaped the bargaining power of workers by fragmenting and creating a wedge between permanent and contract workers (Duvisac, 2018; Jha & Chakraborty, 2012; Nair & Friedman, 2017; FMS, various issues).

In a study of four OEMs, MSIL, Hyundai, Ford, and General Motors, Duvisac (2018, p. 7) found that contract workers get less wage than permanent workers for similar job responsibilities. Permanent workers are paid between Rs.22,000 and Rs.45,000 whereas contract workers are paid anywhere between Rs.6,000 and Rs.12,000. Similar studies by Bose and Pratap (2012) and Jha and Chakrabarty (2012) corroborate this view. These studies have also highlighted the continued vulnerability of contract workers with a bleak prospect of becoming permanent even after working for over five to seven years.[25] Since the early 2000, large OEMs, Tier I and Tier II firms have started to replace permanent workers with contract workers. Between January 2001 and March 2004, MSIL Gurgaon, reduced its regular workforce from 5,770 to 3,334 (Becker-Ritterspach, 2009, 40). It was reported to me interviews that there are currently 1,600 hundred permanent workers and over 4000 contract workers in the Gurgaon plant.[26] The Manesar plant had 900 permanent workers, over 1200 contract workers, 500 trainees and 400 apprentices in 2011 when strikes rocked the plant. This number changed after the violent incident on July 18, 2012 when the management reduced the number of contract workers from 1200 to 200 and instead hired directly what is called Company Trainees (CTs) who were given a contract for seven months at a time.

[25] During an interview with contract workers in the Gurgaon plant of MSIL, a contract worker employed in Tier I supplier firm, Krishna Maruti Ltd. said that he has been working in the plant for ten years with only a marginal increase in wages. Ironically, his nephew has joined the plant through the same contractor and is getting the same wage the older worker is getting after working at the plant for a decade.
[26] Interviews with Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU) representatives revealed this number to me.

Currently, 700 permanent workers are employed in the Manesar plant. The majority of workforce in the Manesar plant is constituted by CTs whose number stand in the range of 2,000-2,200.

The Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act (CLARA), 1970 regulates the conditions of workers hired by labour contractors. Labour is a state subject under the Indian constitution. Alongside the central government, the state governments also formulate their laws[27] regarding labour. CLARA currently applies to firms and labour contractors with 20 or more workers and outlaws the employment of contract labour in 'core' business activities for more than 240 days of 'continuous service'. This Act also requires that contract workers' wages and conditions should be equal to 'workmen' (regular workers) if they perform similar work. For many employers, its most controversial clause is Section 10 (1), which enables governments to prohibit contract labour in any part of a firm's operation if their work is found to be 'core', ongoing or better-suited to regular workers (Shyam Sundar, 2012). The supply chain firms in the auto industry have demanded amendments to CLARA to allow contract labour in core production activities.[28] However, the employment trends in the auto supply chain in Delhi NCR show that restrictions on the employment of contract labour in core activities are seldom enforced, including in the OEMs (Barnes, 2015, p. 358). The contract workers are hired for six or seven months at a time, followed with a break of a few days, usually during the maintenance breaks by firms. This break ensures that contract workers do not claim to have worked 240 days continuously, which guarantees them a permanent job as per the Trade Union Act, 1926. The labour regime in an OEM comprises permanent workers

[27] In many cases, after a general policy is formulated by the central government, provincial governments formulate their laws and make amendments to the existing labour laws. The central government has amalgamated 44 labour laws into four codes. Even before the central government could pass this bill in the parliament, several state governments enacted laws in alignment with the broader policy objective of the central government.

[28] The recent changes in labour laws have done away with CLARA and have introduced fixed term employment. This change may do away with the distinction that exists between permanent and contract workers and create more precarity for workers across the employment contracts. These laws are expected to into force after the general elections in 2024.

(on company pay-roll), trainee workers (on probation, usually for 2-3 years before they are made permanent), contract workers (hired by contractors or contract agencies, and apprentices (one year).

Interviews with union leaders from CTUs such as AITUC, HMS, CITU and major plant-based unions reveal that in many plants workers are migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. Many workers travel directly to the factory gate where they meet labour contractors' representatives, while others are hired from regional areas through a representative or an older worker. In addition, workers also use their social capital to contact labour contractors. In a study in the auto components firms, Barnes et al. (2015, p. 363) found that average wages for contract workers remain much lower than regular workers' wages. The average base wage for contract workers was Rs 5,800 and the average maximum wage was Rs 7,400. In comparison, the average base wage for regular workers was Rs 13,386 and the average maximum wage was Rs 17,000. Instance of contract workers being paid sub-minimum wages was not uncommon either. The wages for contract workers are not enough to cover the cost of reproduction. Room rent, cost of food, children's education for married workers, the meagre wage does not cover commuting expenses. Workers usually leave their families behind in villages in order to save on rental money, and instead share small rooms with other workers in dormitories. Most of these workers rely on overtime to meet the costs of living. In residential spaces near the industrial clusters, the monthly cost of living for a married worker with children is Rs 8,000–10,000, including about Rs 1,500–2,000 to rent a single room with a shared bathroom and kitchen. A room with a separate bathroom and kitchen cost Rs 3,000–4,000 per month. It is common for workers to go into debt to pay landlords or shopkeepers for groceries. There is variation in payment of overtime to workers. In some firms both the regular and contract workers benefitted from a premium rate of overtime, but in several other firms the overtime

payment was at the rate of single hourly wages for contract workers, as against double wages for regular workers (Kerswell & Pratap, 2015). In firms with no union, contractors fail to deposit Employee State Insurance (ESI) and Provident Fund (PF) contributions of workers. This trend is seen in unionised firms as well. The only advantage unionised firms have over the non-unionised is that the unions raise this issue with the management, and in a few cases have been able to force the contractors to make the ESI and PF contribution for contract workers.

An essential part of the contract labour regime is to undermine workers' rights and deny any possibility of unity and solidarity among them. Contractors and the firms take several steps to make it difficult for these workers to unionise or form any basis for collective action. The major labour contractors rotate workers among several plants to which they supply labour. For instance, a contract worker is employed for six months in a plant following which he [29] is sent to another plant for a further six months. This continuous and forced spatial movement denies the contract workers an opportunity to come together or make common cause with other contract workers. The labour contractors hire workers from different regions. As a labour contractor pointed out, "If there is only one state, there will be unity among the workers ... Unity means that if one worker feels homesick, a group of workers will start to feel homesick; if there is a dispute with a worker, it will spread" (Cited in Barnes, 2015, 364). These labour contractors play a major role in dissuading contract workers from participating in strikes.

There is a widespread hostility towards unions in the auto industry. An employer in a Tier 1 supply chain firm says, "Actually, we can afford to have 60 per cent permanent workers [up from 20 per cent]. We can afford this, but there is a muddy situation. One is unionisation of workers. This increases when we have permanent workers. That is one fear."

[29] The Indian auto industry is dominated by male workers in the OEMs as well as in the supply chain.

Another one joins in: ‘The union is like a cancer. Every day they have a new demand” (quoted in Barnes 2015, p. 365). Despite this hostility permanent and contract workers in several plants have come together to fight for union rights, but the contract workers always got the raw end of the bargain. For instance, during the HMSI strike in 2005, both permanent and contract workers fought together to form a union, but during the collective bargaining, the contract workers’ interest were not considered. The gap in wages, working conditions, and facilities between permanent and contract workers became significant. Later on, the union did not oppose any decision by the management to hire more contract workers for core production activities. The gulf widened further when the union did not support the contract workers' wildcat strike in 2008. In several plants, including HMSI and MSIL, after the formation of a union, the workload gradually shifted from permanent workers to contract workers. Unions bargained for and ensured some basic facilities and minimal increase in salary for contract workers along with their own demand, but did not resist increasing contractualisation. Contract workers have resorted to wildcat strikes in several plants, including Omax Dharuhera in 2005, HMSI Gurgaon in 2008, Hero Moto Corps Dharuhera plant in 2009, Asti Electronics in 2014, and MSIL Manesar plant in 2015. The unions and permanent workers stayed away from these strikes.

Attempts to organize contract workers in the auto industry have yielded little success. *Bigul Majdoor Dasta* (BMD) formed Automobile Contract Workers’ Association (ACWA) to organise the contract workers in the auto industry through meetings in Gurgaon and Manesar but attendance in these meetings were negligible. The number increased during a strike or settlement in a plant when contract workers had grievances against the union, but the attendance decreased after a settlement was reached and these workers were offered meagre

rise in wages or threatened by contractors.[30] The National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), an independent trade union federation organised contract workers in the two-wheeler company HeroMotoCorp (HMC), Gurgaon and formed a union. The union, however, does not have a legal basis because it is not recognised by HMC which has a union consisting of permanent workers. Some plant-based unions tried to include contract workers or organize them, but failed because management opposed and threatened to derecognise the existing union. Employing contract workers has several other benefits apart from preventing them from forming their own union or becoming a part of the management-recognised union. In industrial accidents on the shop floor, the contract workers are not given any compensation, their identity cards are taken away by the supervisors/ contractors and their identity as a worker in that particular company and their presence on the site of accident is disputed.[31] This helps the company to bypass accountability to the worker involved in the accident as well as to rules and regulations to deal with injury or death in the workplace.

Majority of the industrial accidents in the auto industry remain unreported. If a permanent worker is involved in an accident, the union fights to ensure some compensation. However, in the case of a contract worker, many times, the company passes on the responsibility to the labour contractors who, in most of the cases, pay no compensation to the injured workers. Reports compiled by Safe in India, a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) stated that industrial accidents in the auto industry located in Gurgaon-Manesar

[30] There are several examples of this trend in the region. For instance, during a union struggle in Asti Electronics in 2014, permanent and contract workers fought together. After the union was formed, a settlement was reached which excluded the contract workers. The ACWA called a meeting and asked the contract workers to go on a strike. However, the ACWA did not have the organizational strength to support a strike and the unsupportive Asti union discouraged the contract workers against a strike. Many workers left the company and the rest resumed work after they were threatened by the contractors.

[31] A story of an accident was narrated by Sameer, a contract worker in SKH Metals which is located in the premises of MSIL's Manesar plant. The plant has over 700 workers out of which only 80-100 are permanent and the rest are contract workers. The plant does not have a union either. Once a robot threw a worker on the conveyor belt due to a fault in a sensor. The worker died immediately. Within five minutes supervisors came and took away the identity cards. Production continued even as the dead body was lying in one corner of the plant. It is only when MSWU intervened, the management handed over the body to his family and ensured that a compensation of five lakh was paid to the family members.

region have increased due to speed up of work and use of robots with whom workers have to work in a rhythm. A minor slip could cost a worker a limb or life. The report stated that more than 1000 workers get injured on the shop floor every year out of which over 80 percent of the accidents occur in the supply chain of the OEMs. The report also stated that the overwhelming majority of the injured workers are contract workers with no recourse against workplace injury or compensation in the absence of union representation. (Safe in India, 2022).[32] Deaths due to industrial accidents in India present a gloomy picture for workers' safety. According to a report tabled in the Parliament by the Minister of Labour, 6,500 workers died in factories, ports and mines between 2014-2020, out of which more than 80 percent or 5,621 workers died in factories (Nanda, 2021). Trade unions dispute this figure and argue that the numbers have been vastly underreported and fear that the relaxation in regulations including regular factory inspections, absence of punitive actions against companies for ignoring safety standards and liberal norms introduced in the new labour codes[33] will see a further increase in industrial accidents in India (Chhabra, 2022).

3.5 Trade Union Struggles

Registration of trade unions in India is governed by The Trade Unions Act, 1926. The provisions of the Act have evolved over the years through judicial pronouncements by the provincial High Courts as well as the Supreme Court of India. There is no legal sanction provided for recognition of a union, although statutory framework exists for the same. Amendments were moved in the Parliament to make union recognition mandatory, but these amendments were never enforced. (Bhowmik, 2012; Shyam Sundar, 2012; Ravishankar,

[32] The data on injury and accidents were collected from Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) hospitals in Delhi NCR as the firms refuse to reveal real numbers on workplace injury.

[33] One of the contentious provisions of the new labour law on Occupational Safety is self-reporting of safety standards in factories by the management in place of regular factory inspection by labour department officials. Trade unions have vehemently opposed this provision by arguing that this provision will exponentially increase industrial accidents and workplace injury in India.

2023). In India, the registration of a union with the Registrar of the Unions in a province does not automatically translate into recognition of the union by the firm. After a number of verdicts by the Supreme Court, it was established that a union could only be recognised if there exists a Standing Order to this effect in the firm (Ravishankar, 2023). In the absence of legal provisions, union recognition has evolved through judicial pronouncements and informal conventions. This has put workers' ability to form a union at a disadvantage as the prerogative to recognise still lies with the firms.

The Trade Unions Act, 1926, lays down the following provisions for union registration. Any seven members of a union may make an application for registration of the union and these seven members are employed by the firm or establishment. One more condition need to be fulfilled: no trade union can be registered unless 10 per cent or 100 workers-whichever is less-are employed by the establishment or the firm (Bhowmik, 1996, 1998). Registration of trade has been a contentious issue over the years. Trade union density has decreased in India especially after the economic reforms when public sector undertakings were either divested or privatised. In 1993 the trade union density in India was 19.03 per cent which declined to 12.56 percent in 2014. As a result, there has been a reduction in the number of strikes and increase in instances of lockouts. Between 1991 and 2019, more person-days were lost because of lockouts than strikes (Balasubramanian et al, 2023).

Trade unions affiliate with one of the several Central Trade Unions (CTUs). These CTUs are central trade union federations, and are affiliated with different national political parties. Similarly, the regional parties also have their own trade unions. Table 1 shows membership of major CTUs in India. Out of the five major CTUs, four are affiliated with political parties: INTUC with Indian National Congress (INC), BMS with Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), AITUC with Communist Party of India (CPI), and CITU with Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M). HMS was affiliated with erstwhile Socialist Party which no

longer exists; it remains unaffiliated with any political party. Another unaffiliated CTU is National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) which is predominantly a federation of different informal workers' unions in India and their reach among the industrial workers is marginal.

Table 3.3: Union membership of five major CTUs in India in 2008 and 2013

Central Trade Unions (CTUs)	**2008**	**2013**
Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)	3.9 million	33.3 million
Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)	6.6 million	17.1 million
All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)	3.4 million	14.2 million
Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS)	3.2 million	9.1 million
Centre for Indian Trade Union (CITU)	3 million	5.7 million
Total Membership	20.1 million	79.4 million

Source: Menon, 2013

The union membership recorded in 2008 is based on annual returns filed by the CTUs in 2002 which was later verified by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. Membership claimed by the CTUs in 2013 annual returns remains unverified by the Ministry. Based on the returns filed in 2013, the total trade union membership in India is estimated to be 100 million and the major trade unions account for 80 percent of this membership (Badigannavar et al., 2020, 369-370). Disaggregated data on trade union membership in the auto industry has been difficult to obtain. The existing scholarship on trade unions in the auto industry rely on newspaper reports, interviews with CTUs, and plant-based unions (Barnes, 2018; Monaco, 2015; Nowak, 2020).[34]

[34] Scholars on industrial relation in India have highlighted the lack of transparency and efficiency in collecting data on strikes and lockouts, industrial accidents, and trade union membership and density in different sectors (Papola, 2014; Shyam Sundar and Sapkal, 2017). The difficulties are compounded when it comes to data in different provinces.

The landscape of auto industry is not located in the traditional centres of trade union movement in India. Concentrations of a large number of workers, a history of workers' struggle against colonial rulers and post-colonial state, and vibrant trade union movements defined cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Kanpur, and Jamshedpur among others. With the economic reforms in the 1990s, the pressure to change labour laws to introduce labour market flexibility to hire and fire grew stronger. However, due to pressure from the Left and other opposition parties, labour reforms could not be carried out by the central government (Jenkins, 2004). However, the state found a spatial fix to the problem by introducing the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act, 2005 which made labour laws ineffective in these zones (Singh, 2009; Shyam Sundar, 2010). While all the locations[35] where the automobile landscape was built were not designated as SEZs, they came up in regions without a history of trade union movements: Delhi NCR, the Chakan region in Pune, the CMA in Chennai, Uttarakhand, and Gujarat. These auto hubs, including their large supply chains, came up in the last three decades. Trade union activity was either non-existent or limited in these areas. These industrial clusters, however, did not remain conflict free for long as deteriorating work conditions, low wages and denial of basic trade union rights compelled workers to strike and engage in other forms of conflicts which at times took violent turns. In the post-reforms India, a majority of the industrial conflicts have occurred in the auto industry (Barnes 2018, 2022; Nowak, 2020; Shyam Sundar, 2012). While strikes in the OEMs including MSIL, HMSI, Hyundai, and Tata Motors received a lot of attention and in fact, galvanised strikes and other forms of industrial actions in the nearby plants, low-scale and short-duration strikes have become a frequent phenomenon in the auto industry. See the table below for a list of industrial actions in the auto industry since 2000.

[35] For instance, the CMA and Chakan region are SEZs, while the industry in Delhi NCR, including the Manesar-Gurgaon region is not an SEZ.

Table 3.4: List of industrial actions in Indian auto industry 2000-2021[36]

Delhi National Capital Region (NCR)		
Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL)	Gurgaon	September 2000-January 2001
HMSI	Manesar	August 2005
HMSI	Manesar	April-May 2008
Sunbeam Auto	Gurgaon	May 2009
Rico Auto	Gurgaon	August-October 2009
Shivam Auto tech	Gurgaon	September-October 2009
Sona Koya Steering Systems	Gurgaon	October 2009
MSIL	Manesar	June-October 2011
Suzuki Powertrain India	Manesar	October 2011
Suzuki Castings	Manesar	October 2011
Suzuki Motorcycle India	Gurgaon	October 2011
Endurance Auto	Manesar	October 2011
Satyam Auto	Manesar	October 2011
Hilex India	Manesar	October 2011
MSIL	Manesar	July 2012
Napino Auto	Gurgaon	March 2014
Shriram Pistons and Rings	Alwar	April 2014
Asti electronics India	Gurgaon	December 2014-January 2015
Bridgestone Tyres India	Manesar	September 2015

[36] The data on industrial action in the auto industry compiled by Barnes (2018) has been supplemented by information from newspapers and conversations with labour activists and trade unionists.

MSIL	Manesar	September 2015
HMSI	Alwar	December 2015-February 2016
Rico Industries	Dharuhera	September 2019-March 2020
Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA), Tamil Nadu		
Pricol Ltd	Coimbatore	July 2007, September 2009
Hyundai Motor India Ltd.	Sriperumbudur	May 2008, July 2009, June 2010, Dec 2011,October 2012
MRF Tyres	Chennai	October 2010-June 2011
Caparo Engineering India	Sriperumbudur	December 2011
Dunlop Tyres	Ambattur	February 2012
Renault-Nissan	Sriperumbudur	May-June 2021
Chakkan Industrial Region, Pune, Maharashtra		
Mahindra & Mahindra	Nashik	May 2009-March 2010, March 2013
Bosch Chassis Systems	Pune	July 2009
Bajaj Auto	Pune	June 2013
Force Motors	Pune	March 2015
Bajaj Auto	Pune	January 2017
Gujarat		
General Motors (GM) India	Halol	March-May 2011
Tata Motors	Sanand	February-March 2016, June 2017
Karnataka		

Toyota Kirloskar	Bengaluru	April, June and December, 2001, January-March 2002
Volvo India	Bengaluru	August 2010
Bosch India	Bengaluru	September 2011, November 2013
Tata Marco Polo Motors	Dharwad	February-March 2016
Other Locations		
Graziano Transmissioni plant	Greater NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh	August-September 2008
Dunlop Tyres	West Bengal	October 2011
Asal Auto Stampings	Pantnagar, Uttarakhand	June 2013
Bosch India	Jaipur, Rajasthan	March-April 2015

Source: Barnes 2018, pp. 4-6.

Union formation struggles have been the predominant form of class struggle in the industry. Workers viewed unions have the medium through which job security, higher wages and better working conditions could be achieved. The militant conflicts at MSIL, HMSI, Rico Industries, HeroMotoCorp, Hyundai, Tata Motors, Ford and in several other plants were about forming unions. The plant-level conflicts seldom took a wider form (with the rare exception of MSIL) or resulted in any industry-wide solidarity strikes. Furthermore, these plant-based unions remained aloof from class conflicts happening in other parts of the country, and their participation in the general strikes called by the CTUs also remained marginal. The unions were formed on the basis of solidarity between permanent and contract workers, but the demands of contract workers were ignored by the unions during collective bargaining with the management and in the final agreements. Moreover, after the unions were formed, the contestation between the union and the management declined, and conflicts with

the management mainly took the form of legal battles and centred around increasing wages for the permanent workers with complete neglect of the well-being of the contract workers.

3.6 Conclusion

India's political economy has played a crucial role in shaping the Indian auto industry. The policies regarding the industry evolved along with changes in licensing practices, entry of foreign players, and permission for 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the industry. The industry has undergone a substantial transformation from working in a safeguarded domestic market with only a few automakers to a competitive market with several global players in contention. While most of the automakers have entered India in collaboration with the Indian auto makers, OEMs such as Hyundai and Kia, among others, are producing with no collaborations. The state, both at the national and provincial scale, played a crucial role in the industry's expansion. In the case of MSIL, the state directly promoted an automaker by restricting market access and setting limits on production by other automakers in the 1980s and 1990s. Provincial states have also played their part in promoting automakers such as Hyundai, Kia Motors, HMSI, and several other OEMS by providing land in SEZs, cheaper electricity, access to water and most importantly, restricting labour rights in this industry. The role of the state assumes more importance when the new labour laws are implemented, further restricting the ability of the working class to organise and fight for their basic trade union rights. [37]

The growth of the auto industry has coincided with the growth of a precarious workforce. The workers fought back against their precarity by resorting to strikes and

[37] In the new Industrial Relations Code, 2020, there are serious limitations on the ability of the workers to go on a strike and union formation. For instance, the union/workers will have to give a 45-day's notice before going on a strike which was 15 days as per the previous laws. Similarly, the labour courts will have members from the executive which gives a lot of power to the state governments to decide on the labour disputes with the management. The new labour codes have already been passed by the Indian parliament, but have not been implemented so far.

violence (MSIL, Pricol, Graziano). However, the struggles remained confined to forming unions in specific plants. While plant-based unions are affiliated with major CTUs, no industry-wide collective bargaining exists and issues of one plant remain confined to that plant alone despite the existence of similar precarious working conditions of workers across different auto clusters. The prevalence of a two-tier employment contract with a small number of relatively well-paid full-time workers (especially in the OEMs) and a large number of contract workers with abysmally low wages has a created a new hierarchy within the working class. This hierarchy along with existing social cleavages based on non-class identities such as caste, ethnicity, region, and religion have created obstacles for a class-based solidarity and collective action among workers. The precarity of the workforce in the industry will be further accentuated by increasing automation and use of industrial robotics in large numbers. The auto industry is the major demand driver for use of robotics in India (Narasimhan, 2018; Rais, 2019). After the Covid-19 lockdown, automakers are making a push for use of more robotics to deal with disruptions in production and labour shortage in the event of a future pandemic. Increasing use of robotics on the shop floor has the potential to reduce employment of workers in the auto industry which has its parallel in advanced capitalist countries of the world. The market for the Electric Vehicle (EV) is expanding rapidly with close to 1 million EVs were sold in India in 2022. The Economic Survey of India 2023 predicts that by 2030, the number of EVs produced in India will reach 10 million (Economic Survey of India 2023, 2023). This transition to adoption of EVs will disrupt the existing assembly line, and could reduce the number of workers needed to produce vehicles leading to job loss in the auto sector (Yarlagadda, 2023). Workers in the auto industry are operating in the context of an increase in the share of contract workers without social protection and welfare, rise in the automation in the production process, transition to EVs, and a set of new labour laws which have rolled back existing trade union rights. The future of

the industry will be defined by contradictions between these developments and working class struggles against them.

Chapter 4

The condition of the auto working class in Gurgaon-Manesar

4.1 Introduction

In the preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1959) famously remarked that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence determines their consciousness."[38] The social existence of the auto working class in India, and specifically in Delhi and its surrounding areas is shaped by their class position in the production process which has relegated them to a precarious condition in both spaces of production and reproduction.[39] There is no linear transition from a condition mired in exploitation and repression to a movement towards a working class consciousness that is aware of this condition. In short, social existence of the working class does not automatically lead to a class consciousness that recognises the existing antagonism between itself and capital. Social existence, however, does shape the consciousness of the working class, although in contradictory and uneven ways.

The main objective of this chapter is to provide a context in which the auto workers, especially the Maruti workers' consciousness was formed. This chapter is organised as follows. The second section briefly examines the working and living conditions of auto workers in Gurgaon-Manesar. The third section describes the working conditions of workers in Maruti's Manesar plant and the consciousness of these conditions. This is followed by a discussion of workers' living conditions and the ways workers establish a connection

[38] Although the term "determine" evokes a simplistic metaphor of base and superstructure, Raymond Williams has gone to great lengths to explain what precisely mean in the Marxist theory (Williams, 1973; 1977). William argues that "determine" suggests setting limits on actions and thoughts.
[39] The title of this chapter and its content is influenced by Engels' famous work *The Condition of Working Class in England*, based on his observations and conclusions drawn from government reports.

between the working and living conditions. The final section summarises the discussions in the chapter and offers some generalisations on the importance and potential of material conditions towards the formation of class consciousness and class struggle. This chapter underscores the argument that material conditions are not constituted by wages and working conditions on the shopfloor alone. Living conditions in the spaces of reproduction also constitute an important part of material conditions that shape workers' consciousness and collective action.

4.2 Working and living conditions of auto workers in Gurgaon-Manesar

Delhi and its surrounding areas, administratively known as Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) is the largest auto manufacturing region in India. Within this region, the auto landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar occupy a prime place due to the location of major auto plants such as MSIL, Hero Honda and Hero Motors. This landscape is also dotted with a number of Tier I and Tier II plants which form the basis of a vast network of supply chain. The auto manufacturing industry is dominated by a dual labour regime: a minority of permanent workers and a majority of contract workers. This dual labour regime holds true for both the OEMs and the vast network of supply chains. Thousands of migrant workers work in the industry on low wages with the expectation of a better-paid employment opportunities and permanent jobs (Barnes, 2021; Jha, 2008).

In a study of more than 20 firms in the auto supply chain, Barnes (2018, pp. 154-155) found that contract workers' wages were just 49 per cent of the permanent workers. The minimum wages set by the Government of Haryana in 2023 ranged from Rupees 10,000 ($ 120) for the unskilled workers to 13,000 ($140) for the skilled workers (Hrylabour.gov.in). The wages for the period 2009-2010 was rupees 6,500 for the unskilled workers and 8,000 for the skilled workers. The auto workers' wages, especially the contract workers' wages,

were no more than the minimum wages. A majority of the contract workers do overtime which is often forced and unpaid. In the Tier I firms overtime is one and a half hours while in Tier II firms this time increases to more than two hours per day. During peak production season overtime increases to four to five hours per day and this has had serious consequences for the health of workers and make them injury prone (Bose and Pratap, 2012, p. 57-58; Safe in India, 2022).

Workers also complain about work intensity and the pressure it puts on them. Monaco (2015) has highlighted the intensity of work and repetitiveness in the auto plants in a largescale survey carried out among both OEM and supply chain workers in Delhi NCR. The survey discovers that

> 52.6 per cent of the respondents reported that it takes them between 10 seconds and 1.5 minute to complete their task, while a further 12.2 per cent spends less than 10 minutes on it. This means that 64.8 per cent of the respondents repeat the same operation from a minimum of 85 to a maximum of 2560 times per shift, with a range of 350 to 2560 times for the workers who spend 1.5 minute (Monaco, 2015, p. 170).

Workers complain of not getting even a moment to talk to a fellow worker if a fault is anticipated; however, the they take the blame for any fault, and subsequently results either in being humiliated on the shopfloor, or salary deduction, or in some instances both. They also complain of shorter breaks on the shop floor (two tea breaks of 7.5 minutes each and a 30-minute lunch break) along with inadequate washroom facilities in the plant and limited number of holidays (Monaco, 2015, pp. 174-175). Unsurprisingly, along with higher wages, a reduction in work intensity and extending the duration of breaks from 45 minutes to 60 minutes has been a major demand by workers during different strikes, and particularly so in the Maruti strikes.

Along with difficult working conditions and low wages, the precarious living conditions add to the workers' woes. In Gurgaon-Manesar more than one million workers work in predominantly informal labour market. They live in precarious living arrangements in the urban villages - areas of land within the city designated as rural - where they rent small dormitories from a landowning rentier class (Cowan, 2018; Naik, 2015). A workers' dormitory usually consists four to five vertically built floors and each floor has eight to ten rooms. One dormitory house more than 200 workers. The small rooms in these dormitories are without any windows. Three to five workers share a room where they cook and sleep depending on their shifts. Ram, an unmarried contract worker from Uttar Pradesh, has been working in Maruti's Manesar plant since 2008 and living in a small room along with four other workers in a dormitory in Kho Gaon. When I asked how he managed to live in a such a small room, he described his predicament in the following words:

> When I came to Manesar for work, I had never thought I would live like this (in a small crowded room). But don't have too many options. I am getting a salary of Rs. 9,000, and with overtime I get another Rs.1-2,000. This not enough to live in a better place. Now five of us share a room and pay Rs. 4,000 per month. Two of us work night shifts and the other three work during the day. This is how we make space for ourselves in that room. This is the only way to save some money to send back to my ailing parents and young siblings. When I have so many responsibilities, where is the time to think about better housing facilities? (Ram, August 13, 2014)

The everyday temporal lives of these workers follow the routine of the factory shifts. Despite living for several years at one place, the majority of workers in these urban villages have no proof of residency which might entitle them to some of the welfare benefits provided by the state. A study published by Mezzadri and Srivastava (2015) on garments workers in Delhi NCR suggest that less than five percent of workers have any proof of residence. The

landlords refuse to give any documents to the migrant workers. The fear of losing control over the migrant workers is cited a common reason for not providing these workers with any legal papers. “They are outsiders, we can’t give them papers (residency proof). Or else they will think they have equal rights like us (natives), and won’t listen to us anymore” said a political representative in Kasan village located in Manesar (p.160).

In India’s older industrial regions caste-based living arrangements and segregations were quite visible among inter-state migrant workers. Caste also played a role in hiring by labour contractors for the industries (Joshi, 2005; Parry and Ajay, 2020). Interestingly, in the newly industrialised regions, and particularly in the auto landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar, caste-based living arrangements are not common. The migrant workers came from different castes and live together. Also, caste-based segregation and discrimination, common in India, is not a major factor that divide workers in the living spaces (Barnes, 2021). Instead, regional identity plays a much bigger role. Workers from the same region, and often speaking the same language tend to live together and share the crowded workers’ lodges and smaller rooms. As far as the divisions among workers is concerned, it is the nature of employment (permanent vs contractual) that plays a more important role than any other existing social cleavages such as caste and regional identities. Mukesh, a contract worker from higher caste, who worked at a Tier I supplier firm Napino Auto and Electronics Ltd., said in a revealing interview which questions many long-held assumptions about the working class in India:

> I am a Maithili Brahman (higher caste) from Darbhanga district in Bihar. There are so many workers from my place working in Napino and other plants in the estate (IMT Manesar), and they come from different castes. I share a room with a chamar (dalit) and a Yadav (backward class or OBC). Initially I was hesitant to live with these other caste people. But after some time, I got used to it and don’t feel anything. They are my friends now. Some of friends who are of my caste live in better places because

> they have been made permanent. This is the major reason (dividing factor) for distance between us. Union people always say, 'there are only two castes in here: permanent and contract.' Everything else is not important anymore and I agree with them. (Mukesh, August 12, 2014)

Although no largescale study on whether caste plays a role in workers' choice of living space has been undertaken among the auto working class, during interviews with workers in living spaces, and the descriptions on strike actions in various factories revealed that regional identity plays a bigger role than caste identity, and employment status plays the most important role in solidarity between workers, in both living and working spaces. This was evident during strikes in HMSI (2005), Rico Industries (2009), MSIL (2011), Asti Electronics (2014), Honda Tapukhera (2018-19) and in many other factories in the region.

The majority of workers in the auto industry work and live in precarious and repressive conditions. Even as the industry has grown manifold and employs millions of workers, the benefits of this growth have not reached the workers. The central trade unions have been demanding higher minimum wages for a long time without any positive outcome. Moreover, in the absence of basic democratic rights to have unions in the plant as is the case in a majority of plants in the industry, workers are left without any medium to channel their grievances, and demand better working and living conditions. In the light of a brief discussion on general condition of workers in the industry, it is pertinent to ask how workers themselves see their working and living conditions, and in what ways do they think about improving their conditions. The next two sections on the conditions of Maruti workers in the Manesar plant will deal with this question, and examine how their consciousness is shaped by their working and living conditions.

4.3 Working conditions of the Maruti workers

The majority of workforce in the Manesar plant came from Haryana followed by Rajasthan. Workers also came from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. While the skilled workers held diplomas from the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs),[40] the unskilled workers joined the company with a high school education. An unofficial policy was adopted at the Manesar plant according to which only younger workers were hired. While there was an explicit reason given for this (that younger workers would work harder than older ones), there was a consensus among workers, labour activists and former union members in IMT Manesar that this was done to ensure a non-political workforce, a workforce which had not participated in strikes or trade union activities in the region. An apprehension about a politically-conscious workforce with a prior experience of working class struggles was evident in the company's hiring policy.

There were no permanent workers when the Manesar plant began production in 2007. Only a handful of permanent workers were hired from the Gurgaon plant[41] to train the new recruits. Over 300-400 contract workers were also hired from the Gurgaon plant in order to make use of their skill in running the plant. The company hired apprentices trained in different trades directly from the ITIs for one year. The company also hired workers through

[40] The Directorate General of Training (DGT) (erstwhile DGE&T, Ministry of Labour and Employment) in the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India initiated Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS) in 1950 by establishing about 50 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) for imparting skills in various vocational trades to meet the skilled manpower requirements for technology and industrial growth of the country. The second major phase of increase in ITIs came with the oil-boom in West-Asia and export of skilled manpower to that region from India. Several new private ITIs were established in 1980's in southern states mostly in Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, etc. from where trained craftsmen found placement mainly in Gulf countries. In 1980, there were 830 ITIs and the number rose to 1900 ITIs in 1987. During 1990's, the growth of ITIs had been steep and presently there are over 10,750 ITIs (2275 in Govt. & 8475 in Private Sector) having a total seating capacity of 15.22 lakhs. The period of training for various trades varies from six months to two years and the entry qualification varies from 8th to12th class pass, depending on the requirements of training in different trades. Since 2000 new trades like Mechanic Diesel Engine, Mechanic auto-body repair and painting among others have been introduced in large numbers in the ITIs. Major auto-makers like MSIL and Hyundai have set-up Automobile Skill Enhancement Centres (ASEC) in different ITIs.

[41] MUKU president Rajesh Sharma said in an interview with the author that around 200 workers were loaned from the Gurgaon plant and who rejoined the Gurgaon plant in one year after the Manesar plant hire workers in large numbers. However, the contract workers hired from the Gurgaon plant continued to work at the Manesar plant.

labour contractors. The contract of the ITI workers was renewed only after a supervisor gave a letter of "good conduct, discipline and 95% attendance." The apprentices were later promoted to Technical Trainees (TT) who then were eligible to become permanent after three years. In 2010-11 the total workforce at the Manesar increased to over 3,000 from 700-800 when the plant opened in 2007. It consisted of 1,000 permanent workers, 1,300 contract workers, 500 apprentices, and 200 casual workers who are usually hired for manual unskilled work. Although a difference existed in terms of employment status (permanent, contractual and apprentices), they did similar work in the plant.

For many workers, employment at a Maruti plant earned a certain status in the family and village, and offered a way out of dependence on agriculture. Describing the status and pride that a job at Maruti entails for a person with a family background in agriculture, Manish a terminated permanent worker, said to me the following:

> I was the only person in my family to work in an industry. All my family members worked in the field [agriculture]. Everyone was so happy when I found work at Maruti. They told me I was their pride. I was happy that I didn't have to do farming. (Manish, July 20, 2015)

This symbolic pride of working for Maruti, however, did not translate into material gains. The salary of permanent workers was in the range of Rs. 14,000-16,000 (USD180-200) per month, while the contract workers and the apprentices got Rs.10,000 and Rs. 6,000 (USD 110-80) respectively. This wage given by India's largest carmaker to its workers is abysmally low. Aware of this trend of low wages in India's manufacturing sector, the central trade unions (CTUs) have been demanding a minimum monthly wage of Rupees 20,000 (Times of India, 2023). A large part of workers' salary was linked to an arbitrary attendance system consisting of a variable and fixed element. The variable element was called

Production Performance Rewards Scheme (PPRS). It constituted about 50 per cent of the salary, and was linked to workers' leave record (PUDR, 2012, p,15). The PPRS system cause a lot of discontent among workers; it did not differentiate between permanent and contract workers. Furthermore, paid leave did not exist. Unplanned leave led to salary cuts. If a worker took one day's leave, Rs.1,500 was deducted from their salary; four days' leave meant a deduction of Rs. 6,000. If a permanent workers' salary was Rs.15,000, taking a leave of four days meant the deduction of close to 40 per cent in the monthly salary. In the case of contract workers and apprentices, such a deduction meant a negligible salary at the end of the month. What was more reprehensible was a deduction of double the amount (3,000 per day), if the leave was unplanned. Amit, a permanent worker in the maintenance department complained: "Where does it happen that you can't take a leave if you are sick, you have a marriage or funeral to attend or any other urgent work. We were just slaves of the company." While there was no justification for the company's policy on planned leaves, penalising the unplanned leave was justified by an MSIL official when he remarked, "Every unplanned leave costs the company heavily. Each worker has been given a specific role in the production and supply chain. If they do not inform the supervisor well in advance, then production gets hampered" (quoted in Banerjee and Sharma, 2011).

The practice of linking salary with leave became unbearable for workers in the context of the high intensity of work. The Manesar plant was more mechanised than the Gurgaon plant, and it was done with a purpose. Bhargava and Seetha (2012) point out that since the establishment of the Manesar plant, Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) put an emphasis on more mechanisation in order to avoid labour conflict such the three-month conflict in 2000-01. SMC wanted the Manesar plant to operate like its plant in Kosai, Japan, with high level of automation. While work practices in the Gurgaon plant developed over a period of three decades and many of its operations are manual in nature, the Manesar plant

was expected to be more efficient (p, 131). In the paint and weld shops, workers worked alongside robots. This workplace strategy increased the intensity of work manifold since workers had to compete with robots in terms of faster work. Describing the experience of working in the paint shop, Satish, a terminated permanent worker, shared his experience with me:

> Working in paint shop is difficult. To work with so many chemicals round us, we would stink of paint all the time. But the most difficult part was working with the robots. On the one side there would be 12 robots and on the other side there would be 12 of us (workers). We had to follow the robot's pace of work. In a way we had to follow the robots, we couldn't take our eyes off work even for a second. (Satish, July 28, 2014)

Workers complained of not having a daily target on how many cars needed to be produced. Regardless of the number of cars produced, the assembly line continued, and this made working on the line more strenuous. Relievers were not provided to workers if they were exhausted or had to take a washroom break. The speed affected workers in paint shop, welding, and casting. While in the Gurgaon plant, one car was produced in one minute, it took 45 seconds to produce a car in the Manesar plant (PUDR, 2012, p. 10). The shops and assembly line ran in three shifts. The A shift ran from 6.30 AM to 3.30 PM. The B shift ran from 3.30 to 12.30. The paint and weld shops along with the maintenance work was carried out in the C shift that ran from 12-30 to 6.30. If commuting time and assembly time before a shift is added to the work schedule, the working day easily went past 10 hours.

A major complaint of Manesar workers was the short time for lunch and tea break. One shift consisted of nine hours with 30 minutes for lunch break and two tea breaks of seven and half minute each. The canteen is located almost one kilometer away from the assembly

line which made it difficult for workers to eat at ease; they had to reach the canteen running, eat food and come back running to report at the work-station. Being late for even one minute invited abuse by supervisors and sometime half-days' pay cut. The compensation for overtime was meagre as overtime pay of one hour was not more than ten or fifteen rupees. The punishing work schedule got more strenuous when workers had to keep working even after their shift ended until the workers from the next shift joined the work station. This provision was part of the Standing Orders of MSIL:

> Workmen working in one shift shall not leave their work unless and until they are relieved by the workmen of [the] succeeding shift. In any event of workmen for such succeeding shift failing to report for work, the concerned workmen on duty shall continue to work in the said shift. (Standing Orders, Section 10).

This provision put a lot of stress on workers. Speaking of the hardship, Khusiram said:

> Every second or even half a second was crucial. We just didn't have the time to breathe, drink water or wipe sweat from our face. Initially we thought we were young, so we could do. After 2-3 years we realised we couldn't keep doing it. (Khusiram, August 18, 2014)

The Standing Orders were also used for labour control in the plant. The Orders laid down conditions for workers who were required to sign the document to begin work at the company. These conditions were implemented in the Gurgaon plant, but not with the same ferocity they were implemented in the Manesar plant[42] which ranged from not allowing workers from slowing down work, making derogatory statements against the company and

[42] MUKU general secretary Kuldeep Jhangu, said in an interview to me that the Standing Orders were in place in the Gurgaon plant but was lenient compared to the Manesar plant. He said that the reason for the difference is management's intent to increase production by avoiding indiscipline. In contrast, the Gurgaon workers had a "good" relation with the management, so excessive regulation was not required. What this statement reflects is not a disciplined work-space but a completely controlled space in the Gurgaon plant along with a subservient union.

management, spreading rumours. The Orders also laid down frivolous matters such as barring workers from singing and gossiping in the plant.

The short breaks and the pressure to report on time took a toll on workers. Every delay was reprimanded with job loss or difficulties of becoming a permanent worker. Workers lived in constant fear. Speaking of the pressure, Ravinder, a contract worker in the assembly line told me:

> There was a lot of work pressure in the plant. Abuse by supervisors was common. They would abuse us if we were late by even one or two minutes from tea or lunch break. Once I had to go the washroom a couple of times due to an upset stomach. I was scolded by the supervisor. He said, 'If you cheat like this, you will never become a permanent.' I wasn't cheating, but they didn't want to even hear us. I lived in constant fear of losing my job, not becoming a permanent. (Ravinder, September 17, 2015)

The workers were pressed for time to even fetch water from the nearest water cooler. Manish said, "Once the shift started, we didn't have the time to even drink water. There was so much of workload. Water will be near you, just two feet away from the work station but you can't drink it." When workers complained about work intensity, there were asked to report to the HR, and were either abused or were often asked to sign a document to maintain discipline in the plant.

The management also adopted other strategies – strategies of a more cultural character – to mollify the disgruntled workers. The supervisors often told the complaining Haryanvi workers that they were "from a marital race and they should accept hard work as a matter of

pride." [43] The notion of sacrificing for the nation through hard work was also invoked by the supervisors and HR officials in meetings. Mahavir, who was a permanent worker at the plant, narrated an instance when the supervisors asked workers to make sacrifices for the country:

> In the meetings with the HR, the supervisors and the HR people would come and tell us that we were doing all this work for our country, for our motherland. They would tell us that we have to make small sacrifices for our country. We would laugh at such speeches because they were useless and didn't make any sense. Once one of us asked, 'If we all are working for the motherland, why aren't they doing what we are doing?' They do nothing, but get so much of money. (Mahavir, July 29, 2014)

Every fault by workers was recorded by the supervisors which was used against workers when they complained against abusive supervisors and high intensity of work. This form of disciplinary mechanism imposed on workers has had an effect on their consciousness and organization: disciplinary mechanisms have prevented the workers from raising their voices in a collective way because each worker was individualised and thus controlled. Supervisors would invoke a fault that an individual worker might have committed in a fast-running assembly line or in highly mechanised weld and paint shops. Mohit, a former contract worker put the dilemma workers faced in the following words in an interview with him:

> There was so much of work pressure that a worker is bound to make a fault and then the supervisors make a note of it ask us to sign on a record keeping book with our name on it. Once I worked three-hour overtime everyday for a month, but when I got my salary, it was just Rs. 9,000. I didn't get paid for doing overtime. When I

[43] Geographically, Haryana was a part of what was formerly called North West Frontier of India, and they were among the first to face the invaders who came from Central Asia looking for riches in the Indian subcontinent. The view that Haryanvis are a strong and martial race got further reinforced when they were recruited in large numbers by the British Army, and after independence by the Indian military established. In Northern India, and especially in Delhi NCR, people from Haryana are considered aggressive and masculine. This cultural stereotype was used by the Maruti management to divide the workforce between Haryanvi and non-Haryanvi, and local versus migrant workers.

> complained to the HR, my line supervisor was called and he produced my record which showed that I had made some faults two months ago. Using this they threatened me to go back to work or risk losing my job. This was an everyday affair for all of us. (Mohit, November 4, 2015)

Exercising control over was exercised through sowing divisions among workers. The supervisors encouraged workers to spy on each other and report back if any worker was not informing faults to the concerned supervisor. Flimsy rewards were announced for reporting such minor incidents. This strategy initially created division among workers, but gradually workers became aware of the divide that existed between them and the management staff, including the supervisors. Rajveer, a contract worker in weld shop, narrated one such incident:

> My supervisor, who was from Himachal Pradesh, was very abusive; he would always scold us for small mistakes. He was also very cunning. He would come to the work station and ask me to catch the fault of others, and inform him if someone was not working. Once I reported a worker to the supervisor and I got a pen as a reward. But other workers were angry with me. They talked to me after my shift ended and asked me not to do this again. We talked about the harm it did to workers. (Rajveer, October, 10, 2015)

Workers had hoped that after becoming permanent, their work conditions will change and salary would increase. While there was a meagre increase in salary (from Rs. 9000-10,000 to Rs.15,000-16,000), work conditions did not improve and abusive behavior did not stop. In addition, the salary was still linked to the attendance system. Expressing resentment against life in the plant, Jitender, a terminated permanent worker said to me, “Although I became

permanent, nothing changed. Life had become hell in the plant. Transport facilities were provided on select routes, but everything else remained the same."

The workers complained to MUKU about work intensity and abuse by supervisors to no avail. They were told that since it was a different plant, MUKU did not have the authority to intervene. In reality, however, the union was a "pocket union" nominated by the management and did not even voice the grievances of Gurgaon plant workers. During the daily commute and in their lodgings, Manesar workers spoke with workers from HMSI, Rico, and Sona Steering which had unions in their plants. Workers became aware of the benefits of a union: transport facilities, grievance redressal mechanism, higher wages, availability of medical and earned leave. Facilities became a key-word for workers; having a union was considered a guarantee to ensure a number of facilities in the plant. Khusiram described how they came to think of a union:

> We would talk to workers from Honda, Rico, Sona Steering or even the Gurgaon plant. They would tell us that the situation is a little better in their plants. They had bus facilities for all workers; relievers were always present on work stations, getting a leave was not that difficult. The supervisors respected the union. We then thought we needed a union. (Khusiram, August 18, 2014)

Even as workers struggled with work intensity, low wages and verbal abuse on the shop floor, some of them did not consider work in itself a problem, but expected higher wages. Rajpal, a terminated permanent worker put it in the following words:

> Don't think that we were not ready to work hard. We wanted the company to reach new levels of success, but they should also have looked at us, how we worked, how we lived in those over-crowded lodgings. They should also realise that we are human

> beings and we need more money to run our house, to live with dignity in society. (Rajpal, August 5, 2014)

A conversation on forming a union began in late 2010 when workers did not see any improvement in their working conditions even after becoming permanent, although there was a meagre increase in their salary. Apart from working conditions and low wages, the discontent due to poor living conditions shaped workers' consciousness and subsequent demand for a union. Workers did not differentiate between the reasons for their dominated existence both in the spaces of production and reproduction; they established a connection between these two spaces.

4.4 Living conditions of the Maruti workers

As the rural district Gurgaon transformed into a Millennium city (Oldenburg, 2018), residential areas came up to accommodate thousands of migrant workers in overcrowded dormitories. These residential areas are called 'urban villages' – located in the city but considered a village by state planning institutions (Cowan, 2018; Gururani, 2013). Surrounded by hundreds of factories, the villages in Manesar do not have any urban amenities. After the township was conceived in the 1990s, those who had land sold it to Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) which subsequently allotted these lands to industries in order to develop Manesar (Khandelwal, 2012). Having sold fertile agriculture land for setting up of industries, the dominant landed community turned to constructing dormitories for workers employed in thousands of factories in Manesar to earn a living. This transformation – from a landed class to a rentier class – determined the villagers' (landlords and political representatives in the villages) response to workers, and established a linkage between the industries and the villages. As one landlord remarked, "What is in company's interest is in my interest. If the company has problems, we will be ruined." Cox (1991) has highlighted how locally dependent actors form an alliance

with other locally embedded actors (in our case the MSIL and other auto plants) implement strategies to further their own interest. This strategy was on full display in the working class dormitories located in the urban villages in Manesar. Capitalism creates a built environment appropriate to the purposes of production and reproduction (Harvey, 1976). The urban villages around which the industrial township of Manesar developed, served this purpose of capital by providing housing to workers; the built environment also put constraints on workers by regulating their mobility in space. The various means of exercising control over workers' bodies clearly manifested in the living spaces of the Maruti workers.

The local-level political class had its vested interests served by keeping the workers under its domination as several labour contractors were either relatives or politically connected to these local level politicians. There are several other reasons why the villagers seek a strict control over the workers and preserving the local culture is one of them. Describing the rationale for keeping a strict eye on workers and restricting their movement in the villages, the village headman from Kho Gaon, said, "The workers are all migrants and they don't understand the local culture. We have to discipline them all the time. See if they feel they are very free, they will do things which are not in the interest of either us or the company." Pradeep Kuhad, a local-level politician and member of the Gurgaon District Council offered a more insightful reason why the villagers and landlords keep a close watch on the workers:

> If there is a strike, the factories will close down and workers will leave, and if they leave all our houses will be empty. We have no other means of surviving other than these houses, and that is why we won't allow workers to engage in any anti-company activities. And for this reason, we have to keep a strict eye on them, discipline them. These are young workers. If you are not careful with them from the beginning who knows what will happen. (Pradeep Kuhad, September 10, 2015)

Majority of the Maruti workers lived in villages such as Kho Gaon, Aliar-Dhana, Kasan, and Vaas Gaon. They lived in cramped and poorly ventilated houses – called lodges by workers – because of spatial proximity to the plant, relatively low rent (compared to living in Gurgaon), and less commuting time. In one room, usually more than three workers lived which they managed because they worked in different shifts. Everyday life in these spaces was anything but dignified. Apart from poor living conditions, coercion and humiliation by landlords and dominant sections of the villagers (landed class) became a part of everyday life for the workers. MSIL has adopted 21 villages located in Gurgaon and Manesar as a part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (John, 2016). Under the CSR, the company grants funds to the local *panchayats* (village councils), youth organisations, and festival committees. The funds are also given for health infrastructure, sanitation work and providing some basic amenities like streetlights, water filters, and toilet facilities. The migrant workers, however, are excluded from these benefits. Also, these contributions by the Maruti management were meant for establishing a healthy relation with the political class in the villages and use to their advantage to ward off any potential labour organisation and conflicts. The landlords and the supervisors who look after the everyday affairs of the lodges discourage organising workers in the lodges and actively act in support of the company during strikes by discouraging workers from participating in strikes either through verbal threat or through sheer physical coercion.

No transport facilities existed for the Maruti workers till early 2010. It is only after a part of the workforce were made permanent in 2009-10, transport facilities were introduced, but the number of buses were very few. Moreover, the contract workers were not given these facilities. This compelled workers to stay in the villages and face everyday hardships. Saroj Kumar, who worked in the Manesar plant as a contract worker between 2008 and 2012 and

now works as a contract worker in the auto parts manufacturer Bellsonica, said about life in the villages in the following words:

> It was not easy to live in these dormitories. The landlords and their men watched us all the time. What is this? Can't we even talk to our friends freely? On Sundays when we had some free time, we wanted to go around, and talk to people in tea shops. The villagers didn't even like that. If they saw us talking about the company in a tea shop or grocery store, they would shout at us…tell us not to be smart. (Saroj Kumar, July 17, 2015)

While the management was not directly involved in the landlords' activities, there was an implicit consensus among the landlords on the need to discipline the workers. Different companies in Manesar maintained that workers should not do any politics (union activity) in these neighbourhoods, and this was communicated to the village councils. This is one of the major reasons the CTUs could not organise in the villages/neighbourhoods like they used to do in older industrial areas. In many older industrial locations, slums (*basti*) came up around the industries to accommodate large number of workers, both migrant and native workers. Union meetings took place in these slums, and strategies were formulated during strikes and other conflicts with the managements. This was no longer possible in working class neighbourhoods located in these villages. In addition, the companies kept the apprehension alive that if strikes occurred, plants would close and shift to other locations which would result in the lodges or dormitories lying vacant and the villagers would lose a major part of their livelihoods. The dormitories were a major source of income for several villagers who were also politically dominant. The fear of economic insecurity and an implicit consensus on keeping the workers disciplined created a discourse according to which workers, mostly migrant workers, needed to be disciplined and controlled in the village spaces, the spaces of their reproduction.

The landlords demanded workers buy grocery from the grocery shops located at the entrance in each dormitory, usually run by the landlords themselves or their unemployed children. Workers were threatened with eviction and physical violence if they did not buy from these grocery stores. Sometimes the workers managed to sneak in some grocery from outside at a reasonable price compared to the landlord's grocery stores. However, if found out by the landlords or the supervisor who looked after the maintenance of the dormitories, it was not uncommon for workers to face verbal abuse, and at times, physical violence as well. Mohan, a terminated permanent worker from Maharashtra, said,

> Once I had gone to Delhi to see a friend of mine. On my way back I bought some rice and *dal* [lentils]. Somehow, they [the landlord] found out and knocked on my door at two in the morning and threatened me with eviction if I did it again. I was so scared. (Mohan, July 28, 2015)

The landlords tried to restrict the spatial movement of workers in the villages. As one worker put it, "they [the villagers] always told us not to loiter around and keep to ourselves." As most of the workers were migrants, the villagers wanted to "protect" the local women from these migrants. Talking to local women was considered a sin; sometimes the workers were physically punished for violating the rules. Talking about these restrictions, Mohan continued:

> The villagers won't let us roam around in half-pants or shorts saying that there are women and girls in this village. A friend of mine who was returning from the A shift at 3.30 in the afternoon was seen talking to a middle-aged married woman. He was beaten up then and there without asking what they were talking. Another worker who was talking over phone wearing a half-pant was beaten up on the false allegation that he was after the daughter of a neighbouring landlord. We always had to be careful if

> there were women around us. Most of us were young and unmarried, and these villagers always looked at us with suspicion. (Mohan, July 28, 2015)

Workers from other districts of Haryana were also considered migrants by the local people and the workers themselves as well. The self-perception as a migrant, i.e., an outsider or someone from *another place*, and attributing to this status their powerlessness was not uncommon. Satveer, a contract worker from the Karnal district in Haryana and lived in Kho Gaon, expressed the hope that a different residential status could have resulted a different outcome with regard asserting his power in the living space. He said:

> You can't live here peacefully. The villagers act like scoundrels. If it was my village or my district, I would have shown them who I am. But here you can't do anything because they have more power and people. They are the locals. (Satveer, October 21, 2015)

In the old industrial centres such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Kanpur, Jamshedpur and the mining areas in Chhattisgarh, working class neighbourhoods used to be one of the important spaces for organising workers (Chandavarkar, 1994; Joshi, 2003; Nair, 2006; Wersch, 1992). No such organising took place in these villages. In fact, the villages created a spatial barrier between CTUs and other labour organisers and the workers. Trade union activities like union meetings, large gatherings, membership drive was an impossible task to achieve in these villages. Keeping the unions out of these neighbourhoods has been a strategy followed by the management through an implicit understanding with the village councils and political representatives. Pointing out the difference between working class neighbourhoods in older industrial regions and IMT Manesar, Satbir Singh from CITU said:

> Our organisation is limited to operating among workers in the workplace. It is so difficult to enter the villages in IMT [Manesar]. The companies have good

> connections with the local politicians. They won't let us talk to workers in these areas. There was a tradition of organising in the workers' residential areas. We used to do that in Faridabad [older industrial region]. This is not like old working-class areas where unions, workers gathered and talked about problems in factories. Here, they don't want any union [union related activity] in the villages. (Satbir Singh, July 25, 2014)

The living conditions in the working-class neighbourhoods reinforced the feeling of powerlessness workers experienced on the shop floor. Their response to improving the living conditions, however, was varied. Ajit, a contract worker said, "We expected the company to provide us with housing facilities. We would have lived happily even if it was a small house, but we can't live in these lodgings." Jitesh, another contract worker joined him:

> The management should increase our wages so that we can go to some good place and rent a good room in a good area. I am avoiding the issue of marriage because I know I can't bring my wife to such a small house. (Jitesh, August 23, 2015)

Another worker echoed this view: 'I think the only way out is to get a better salary. That will solve all problems…I mean we could go elsewhere, and rent a better place'. While some workers expected the management to provide housing or increase wages, several others talked about forming an organisation to deal with issues they were facing in the villages. The following discussion ensued in a worker's lodging in Vaas Gaon:

> We used to discuss among ourselves that we needed an organisation that would work on these issues [housing and maltreatment by the landlords]. We couldn't do it alone. Who are we? Nothing would happen if we just talk about our grievances, complain about them. We had to come together. (Manoranjan, November 7, 2015)

> The Gurgaon plant had a powerful union and they had succeeded in getting the company build two housing colonies. We thought [that] forming a union would help in getting a housing colony or some such thing. (Roshan Kumar, November 7, 2015)

> I was going to take a loan and buy a house once I became permanent. I was not going to live here for long. But only a union could make me permanent. We thought, 'look at Honda permanent workers.' I knew some of them who became permanent after they formed a union, and went to better [housing] societies, even though they were renting. Some of them have even bought houses. We wanted the same for us, for our families. (Yogesh, November 7, 2015)

What is clear from this section and the previous section is this: the spaces of work (labour) and space of reproduction are filled with conflicts of interests between workers on the one hand and the factory management and landowners on the other. The workers have responded in a number of ways to their difficult working and living conditions: these have ranged from an individual escape from the cramped rooms to engaging in collective actions for better wages. While establishing a connection between working and living conditions, the workers believed that that they could live in better places and improve their living conditions through collective struggle. The collective struggle has included protests as well as attempts to form an independent union as a vehicle of collective struggle.

4.5 Conclusion

The Indian auto industry has registered exponential growth after economic reforms were carried out in the 1990s. The industry's growth resulted in the employment of millions of workers in the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and the supply chain. However, the majority of the workers employed in these firms worked in precarious conditions with low wages, increased intensity of work, absence of job security and trade union rights.

Workers experienced repressive living conditions in the overcrowded dormitories. The Maruti workers' experience of working and living conditions reflected the precarious conditions of the auto working class in Gurgaon-Manesar.

Faced with strenuous working conditions, low wages and repressive living conditions, Maruti's Manesar workers decided to form a separate union. This decision to seek a solution to their problems in the working and living spaces was spontaneous as it emerged from conversations that the workers had among themselves. The working and living conditions shaped the workers' consciousness. This spontaneity was also influenced by the spatiality of the existing trade union politics and the benefits it offered to a minority of permanent workers. The contract workers believed that a union would ensure a permanent job and better living conditions while the permanent workers believed that a union could help them get higher wages, and better working conditions. The conditions also hindered the Maruti workers' consciousness in specific ways. The sole focus of the workers was redressal of immediate grievances, which were although important, did not address the causes that led to exploitation and domination in the workplace and the living space. In short, the material conditions of workers did not lead to a consciousness of antagonistic relation between capital and labour, a relation that is irreconcilable. This place-specific and plant-level consciousness did lead to militant strike movements which will be examined in the next chapter. However, as the movement progressed and the class struggle moved forward, the limits of this consciousness revealed itself.

Chapter 5

The Dialectic of Consciousness and Strikes

5.1 Introduction

Strikes have occupied an important place in Marxism because of its potential to transform working class consciousness. The relation between strikes and class consciousness has been contested, however. Lenin in his classic text *What is to be Done?* counterposed spontaneous strikes with conscious strikes. Rosa Luxemburg (1970) saw in mass strikes a great potential to galvanise masses into revolutionary action. In an essay "On Strikes" Lenin (1978) remarked that strikes opened workers' eyes to the nature of capitalism and the state. Lenin and Luxemburg analysed strikes in the context of revolutionary upheavals when socialist parties emerged in large numbers and participated in strikes. In the absence of a revolutionary historical condition, the link between strikes and consciousness was contextualised in workplace conflicts. Richard Hyman, a keen observer of strikes in England, considered strikes as rational assertion of resistance to capitalism (Hyman, 1972, cited Mcllory, 2012, p, 64). Strikes, however, had limited impact on consciousness in the sense that they did not transcend conventional sectional interests. Hyman did not believe that strikes had the potential to create "an explosion of consciousness" (Hyman, 1974, p. 126). The view that strikes do not necessarily create class consciousness among majority of workers in a workplace was supported by a study of glassworkers in Pilkington, England. In this study Lane and Roberts (1970) argued that strikes led to militancy in a minority of workers, the views of the opinions and attitudes of majority of workers towards society did not change. This position forms part of a broader academic literature that considered strikes playing a marginal role in raising working class consciousness (Mann, 1973; Allen, 1981; Batstone et al., 1977). This view has, however, been contested by scholars who argue that strikes play an

important role in making workers more militant (Hartley et al.,1983; Beynon, 1985). Presenting a more optimistic picture in an analysis of strikes in the Britain and the USA, Moody and Cohen (1998) term strikes as "opening up an epistemological break in working class consciousness (p, 113).

The relation between strikes and consciousness has remained an understudied area in the Indian context, barring a few exceptions. Bhattacharya (1981) highlights the role of communist trade unions in raising workers' consciousness in the textile industry in colonial India. Similarly, Sen (1979) argues that with the support of Communist parties, industrial strikes can create a higher level of consciousness. It is not just strikes per se, but active participation in the strikes and the ideology of trade union organisers play a crucial role in raising working class consciousness (Patel, 1994). The major thrust of the existing literature on strike in general is on how strikes shape class consciousness, while the impact of class consciousness on shaping the nature of strikes remains peripheral to this analysis. The dialectic of strike and consciousness has to be examined to understand consciousness raising impact of strikes and the impact of consciousness on strikes. My view is that workers' consciousness and workers' struggle (strikes) shape each other and that this relation is mediated by workers' organization (e.g., trade unions) as well as the state institutions.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how class consciousness shaped class struggle (strikes), and in turn, how class struggle shaped class consciousness of the Maruti workers. In short, the chapter will examine the dialectic of class consciousness and class struggle as it is mediated through trade union politics in the region, and state intervention. The chapter is organised in the following way. In the second section, I describe the three crucial strikes that shaped auto workers' struggles in Gurgaon-Manesar. This section is followed by a discussion on how workers at Maruti's Manesar plant came together to form a union despite holding contradictory views on the efficacy of a union. In the fourth section, I

examine the events leading up to the first wildcat strike in the Manesar plant in 2011, the progress of the strike and the strike's impact on workers' consciousness. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the lockout imposed by the Maruti management in the fifth section. The discussion covers the intensification of conflict at the plant, growing solidarity among permanent and contract workers and state intervention in favour of MSIL. Section six examines events around the second strike, and the ways it shaped workers' consciousness. The second strike revealed the potential of working class movements expressed through the struggle in the Manesar plant and the limitations of trade unions in giving voice to workers' discontent. In the concluding section, I provide a summary of the findings and draw out some conceptual implications.

5.2 The geography of auto workers' struggle in Gurgaon-Manesar

Three major working class struggles shaped auto workers' politics in Gurgaon-Manesar. The most notable among these were the strikes in the Maruti's Gurgaon plant. The first union in Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL) was promoted by the management before the Central trade unions (CTUs) could initiate union formation[44] process (Bhargava and Seetha, 2012, p, 303). Initially, the Maruti Udyog Employees Union (MUEU) was affiliated with INTUC, the trade union wing of the then ruling party Indian National Congress (INC), but ended this affiliation in 1987 (Bhargava and Seetha, 2012, pp, 305-6; Pingle, 1999, p. 111). In addition, the management recognised only one union as bargaining agent for the workers (Bhargava and Seetha, 2012, p, 303). This was done to prevent multiple unionism that characterised industrial relations in India. [45] Union elections were held for the first time in 1987 and

[44] The late AITUC general secretary, Gurudas Dasgupta said in an interview that the government did not want the Left-party based unions to organise workers in MUL.

[45] Multiple unionism refers to the presence more than one union in a firm. During collective bargaining all the unions formed in the firm negotiate with the management before agreeing on a contract. Scholars of industrial relations in India have long argued that multiple unionism has weakened trade union movement in India because such unionism is divided along party lines and provides an opportunity to employers to divide the workers (Ramaswamy, 1984; Pathy, 1988; Bhowmik, 1998). MUL was established at a time when the famous textile

Mathew Abraham, a militant worker from Kerala,[46] became the president of the union. The new union demanded benefits for workers such as housing facilities, production-based incentives based on company's profit every year, and permanent position for a small number of contract workers. The management refused to consider these demands following which the union went on tool-down strike for two weeks in 1988. This was the first recorded strike in MUL.

The management conceded the demands for incentives after the union gave a strike notice. A production-based incentive was introduced in 1989. The demand for incentives was accepted because of two factors: the management wanted to avoid labour conflicts in the initial stages of the company; second, the management believed, as Bhargava and Geetha (2012) point out, that "providing incentives would secure workers' consent on automation and other methods of improving productivity" (p, 333). The scheme came up for review in 1995 as productivity of MUL had increased manifold and the bonus of workers was several times more than their basic salary. In January 1996, the management notified a new scheme that was to last till 1999. The revised scheme laid out that product quality and sales in the market would determine the bonus of workers. If the company did not do well in the market, workers would not get higher bonus (Khattar 2013, pp, 204-05). The new incentive scheme was implemented despite workers' protests. The further extension of the scheme coincided with the collective bargaining in 2000. The union served a demand charter on March 23, 2000, with a focus on the incentive scheme. The union wanted the incentive scheme linked to production volume only, while the management wanted to link it to capacity utilization, quality, and individual performance. The management notified the scheme which provided

strikes in Bombay, longest strike in Indian industrial relation, were raging. There were several unions struggling to be the sole bargaining agents at the industry-wide level (Bakshi, 1986).

[46] The province of Kerala is known for its strong trade union movement. Mathew Abraham had early exposure to this movement and he used this experience to fight for workers' rights in the Gurgaon plant.

that bonus would be cut if there was a contraction in demand and slowdown in sales. The union objected to this provision (Bhargava and Seetha, 2012, p, 337).

As a mark of protest, the union resorted to a number of tactics: banging of plates in the canteen, sloganeering, burning effigies of the management, not wearing uniform to the factory, wearing black-badges, downing tools, and holding gate meetings. The workers began a tool-down strike in for two hours in both A and B shifts. The management declared the tool-down strike illegal for not providing a mandatory 14 day's notice under the Industrial Disputes Act (IDA) 1947. [47] The tool-down strike continued until 12 October, 2000. 80 workers were suspended during the tool-down strike period, but the union did not call off the strike.

On October 12, workers' entry to the plant was conditional on signing a Good Conduct Undertaking (GCU) [48] which had the following conditions: the individual worker would not indulge in go-slow nor resort to tool-down or stay-in strike; the worker would not indulge in any other activities in breach of the Certified Standing Order which has the effect of adversely affecting the production and discipline; the breach of the GCU shall constitute gross misconduct and if found indulging in any activity in breach of this undertaking, the management shall have the legal right to take appropriate legal action (PUDR, 2001, p, 6).

6 The legal provision regarding strikes and lockouts have been enshrined in Chapter V of the IDA(Industrial Disputes Act), 1947. Section 22(1) of Chapter V says that no person employed in a public utility service shall go on strike, in breach of contract-

a) Without giving to the employer notice of strike, as hereinafter provided, within six weeks before striking; or
b) Within fourteen days of giving such notice; or
c) Before the expiry of the date of the strike specified in any such notice as aforesaid; or
d) During the pendency of any conciliation proceedings before a conciliation officer and seven days after the conclusion of such proceedings. (The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. Universal Law Publishing, NOIDA, 2015)

[48] Forcing workers to sign a GCU in case of a conflict in the company has become a standard practice to coerce workers in the industrial belt of Gurgaon-Manesar since the Maruti strike of 2000-01. It was used earlier in Escorts group, located in Faridabad, where workers had gone on strike over the wage and incentives negotiations in 1998. There is no stipulation such a practice under the IDA, 1947. Labour lawyer Sanjay Joshi (Delhi High Court) states that it has become a solely management prerogative over which government does not want to exercise any control (interview with author on 10 August, 2014). The same tactic of using GCU was used for workers in the Manesar plant in 2011.

In violation of labour rights, the company declared a lockout following the refusal of workers to sign the GCU.[49] The factory gates remained closed for the workers, and subsequently the Deputy Commissioner (administration)[50] passed an order prohibiting any assembly of workers within 100 meters of the factory gates. The workers continued their agitation near the factory gate; the agitations also took places at the Deputy Commissioners' office and the residences of elected representatives in Haryana. This Gurgaon-based agitation continued till December 13. Two former Prime Ministers, Chandrasekhar and V. P. Singh, and several Member of Parliaments (MPs) addressed workers at the gate meetings; they called on the management to allow workers inside the factory without forcing them to sign the GCU. The union challenged the GCU in the Gurgaon Sessions Court which rejected the case and said that the undertaking was in consonance with the certified standing orders of the company framed under the Industrial Employees (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 (Bhargava and Seetha, 2012, p 337).

The protests and agitation continued despite this unfavourable verdict and increasing pressure from the state administration. During the lockout, The District Magistrate (DM) and the Superintendent of Police visited the company frequently and assured the management of every possible help in dealing with workers. The district administration supported the company throughout the strike for the fear that the strike in the Gurgaon plant could spark strikes across the industrial belt in Haryana. The Deputy Commissioner told the management during the strike, "If you do not put out the fire, it will engulf all of us" (cited in Khattar, 2013, p, 206).

[49] Section 22(2) of the IDA, 1947 states that no employer carrying on any public utility service shall lock-out any of his workmen

a. without giving them notice of lockout as hereinafter provided, within six weeks before locking-out; or
b. within fourteen of giving such notice; or
c. before the expiry of the date of lock-out specified in any such notice as aforesaid; or
d. during the pendency of any conciliation proceedings before a conciliation officer and seven days after the conclusion of such proceedings.

[50] Deputy Commissioner is the administrative head of a district.

In order to resolve the conflict, a meeting was held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on October 24, 2000, attended by the Industries Secretary, the Secretary to the PMO and the Maruti management. Workers were asked to accept the GCU, which they refused and demanded immediate reinstatement of all the suspended workers. The stalemate continued, and on November 29, a Calling Attention Motion[51] was moved in *Lok Sabha* (the lower house in the Indian Parliament). Manohar Joshi, the then Heavy Industry Minister, accepted that the GCU violates the principles of collective bargaining and it should be withdrawn (PUDR, 2001, p, 7). The Minister's intervention in the parliament had little impact on the Maruti management; the entry inside the factory was still conditional upon individual workers signing the GCU. On 13 December, 4,000 workers suddenly arrived at Udyog Bhavan (Ministry of Industries) with no prior notice and occupied the portion of the parking lot. The workers continued to stay there through the bitter winter until 8 January, 2001.

This incident got the attention of political parties and an adjournment motion[52] supported by 200 Members of Parliament (MPs) was moved in Lok Sabha to end the lockout. [53] The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition government did not accept the motion, but called an all-party meeting to discuss the issue. It was decided in the meeting that an acceptable compromise could be reached if the workers accepted the new incentive scheme and the management reinstated all suspended and dismissed workers. In addition, the all-party meeting delegated Vasudev Acharya, representing the CPI (M) [the Communist Party of India (Marxist)], to talk to the workers, and Manohar Joshi, the Industries Minister to talk to the Maruti management in order to reach an acceptable compromise. The union had to

[51] Calling Attention Motion is a means through which members in Rajya Sabha, the upper house in parliament where questions of public importance that require urgent attention are raised.
[52] Adjournment motion is moved to raise matters of urgent public importance in Lok Sabha, the lower house in Parliament.
[53] A glimpse of the debate in *Lok Sabha* on the conflict is found in https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1005395/

agree to giving a collective GCU instead of individual undertaking and accepted the new incentives scheme.[54] The management did not withdraw the suspension of the 80 workers.

The conflict provided an opportunity for the management to restructure the workforce in the plant. Jagdish Khattar, the former Managing Director at MSIL, said: "In early October 2000 over 4000 workers, almost 70 percent of the workforce, stopped work and walked out of the factory gates. It took us 48 hours to get the operations back to a semblance of normalcy, but the strike continued for three tough months. And yet, it did us a world of good." (Khattar, 2013, p, 203). The management found the strike helpful to reorganize production. "The strike," Khattar says, "had also exposed our inherent weakness as a company. If our operations could be managed without 70 per cent of the workforce, what were we doing before the strike?" (Khattar, 2013, p, 216).

In the middle of 2001 an early retirement scheme, euphemistically called Voluntary retirement Scheme (VRS),[55] was introduced. The scheme had been used by companies to bypass the relevant provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and offer an exit option to workers to shed off surplus labour. The scheme dissolves a job contract for a lump sum amount which is more than the terminal benefit (Khasnabis & Banerjea, 1996; Vijaybhaskar, 2015). A large number of workers and leading union members were forced to accept the VRS and leave the company. [56] The strike provided an opportunity to shrink the workforce and hire more contract workers while the management also wanted to get rid of the militant workers and leading union members. The management found it "time consuming" to

[54] Ram Kumar said during an interview said that the union had no choice as workers were getting exhausted and the central and state governments stood in support of MUL, not workers.
[55] The earlier labour laws on retrenchment of workers stated that the company has to take permission of the state government before laying off workers where the strength of the workforce is more than 100. The employers found a way to deal with this regulation by devising the VRS scheme. Amarjit Kaur, General Secretary AITUC said in an interview to the author on July 19, 2014, that the state-owned PSUs were the first to launch this devious scheme to get rid of workers after the economic reforms were introduced in 1991.
[56] Several members of the erstwhile union including former General Secretary Mathew Abraham, Vice-President Ram Kumar and Treasurer Mangat Ram are fighting the case which is still pending in the Supreme Court of India twenty years later.

continue with legal proceedings before any action could be taken against several workers. The VRS was brought in to make a "clean break" (Khattar, 2013, p, 229). Out of the total workforce of 6,000, over 1,000 workers were forced to take the VRS. The management went systematically about the scheme and drew three lists, colour-coded in green, yellow, and red; the red list comprised workers who had to be fired or were pressurized to accept the VRS. The lists were reviewed daily and future course of action was planned. It was like a "mission to erase all traces of unpleasant memories" (Khattar, 2013, p, 231). VRS was brought in again in 2003 and over 2000 workers left the company after accepting the offer.

The union members and more than forty militant workers were terminated from work following the strike in 2000-01. The management promoted a new union Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU) after the old union was derecognised which subsequently lost its legitimacy among workers, as it did not represent their grievances to the management anymore. The state institutions such as the police, general administration, and lower courts supported MUL against the workers. The district administration and judiciary stood firmly with the company against the workers. The workers got support from CTUs, especially the Left-based unions in the form of campaigning, raising the issue in different states, solidarity strikes by unions in PSUs. The struggle, however, did not get support from other workers in the Gurgaon region as it remained confined to the gates of Maruti. Reflecting on the struggle, Mangat Ram, a former office bearer of the MUEU, said, "Maruti's struggle remained Maruti's struggle; we did not seek local workers' [from factories based in Gurgaon and adjoining areas] support. We believed we would win because of our numbers." What became clear after the lockout/strike and derecognising the old union was that Maruti would not accept any challenge to its complete domination over workers. Workers' consent to domination was achieved through the use of legal mechanisms and the use of force. The Gurgaon plant did not witness a single strike after the conflict in 2000-01.

Another major conflict emerged in Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India Pvt. Ltd. (HMSI) which is a subsidiary of Honda Motor Company Ltd, Japan. It began operations in IMT Manesar in 2001. The company did not allow the formation of a union. The political situation inside the plant changed after a Left-supported and Congress-led centrist government United Progressive Alliance (UPA) came to power at the centre in 2004. AITUC general secretary and Member of Parliament (MP) Gurudas Dasgupta took initiatives to form a union in the HMSI plant. The union formation struggles at HMSI occurred when workers were on the defensive and companies did not tolerate unions in the plants following the defeat of the workers at Maruti's Gurgaon plant.

The permanent workers began to talk about a union in mid-2004, three years after the plant began operations. The efforts were accelerated when workers met AITUC officials who promised to get a union registered in six months. The management came to know about these efforts and started penalising workers by suspending the leading workers. In December 2004, a manager slapped a worker who was leading the union formation efforts. Four more workers were suspended after they expressed solidarity with the slapped worker. Suspensions, wage cut, verbal abuse continued for six months and the workers responded to this oppression by going on a strike on June 25, 2005. In retaliation, over 500 workers were suspended. This was the first major strike in IMT Manesar after the industrial cluster was established in the mid-1990s. The management asked the suspended workers to sign a contract (like a GCU) that they would not engage in strikes and that they would abide by the company rules. The workers refused to sign the contract. Production came to a grinding halt. More than 3,000 workers struck. They included 1,000 permanent workers and over 2,000 contract workers, apprentices, and casual workers. The new industrial region's peaceful climate was disturbed with the strike.

Large contingents of police force arrived in IMT Manesar and the HMSI plant on July 25. Workers took out a march in the IMT Manesar and tried to block the National Highway 8 which is considered to be the busiest highway in the subcontinent and which connects the political capital (Delhi) to the financial capital (Mumbai). They were forced by the police to retreat to the plant gates. The demonstrations and sloganeering continued till evening when police started beating up workers to disperse them and allow scabs to enter the plant. More than 500 workers were injured, with several workers having experienced head injuries and broken limbs. Several hundred workers were arrested. The Left parties gave a solidarity strike to protest against police brutality. After the central government intervened due to pressure from the Left parties, the suspended workers were taken back and the jailed workers were released. Japanese envoy to India, Yasukuni Enoki, remarked that the strike would affect Japanese FDI in India (Bhattacharjya and Mehra, 2005). An AITUC-affiliated union was formed in late 2005 following which several concessions were offered to the workers. Transport facilities were provided to permanent workers and relievers were stationed on shop floor to reduce the intensity of work. A settlement was reached and workers' wages were hiked. However, the contract workers were left out of the settlement. Their situation did not improve, wages remained stagnant, and working conditions remained strenuous compared to the permanent workers who were provided relievers. In protest, they struck in 2007-08 when negotiations began for the three-yearly settlement. The union, Honda Motors and Scooters India Employees Union (HMSIEU), did not support the striking workers and sided with the management. The contract workers felt betrayed; hundreds of them were fired by their contractors and the rest joined work on the same wage. The solidarity between permanent and contract workers witnessed during the conflict did not last long. The division and hierarchy between permanent and contract workers re-surfaced after the union was formed. The strike remained confined to the gates of HMSI and did not invoke solidarity from other workers in

IMT Manesar. The union celebrated July 25 as solidarity day every year to mark the police brutality against workers, but this celebration excluded the contract workers' interests. Although the union was considered a strong and assertive union in the region, it reinforced the duality in the workforce: A well-paid permanent workforce and low-wage contract workers. By the end of 2008-09, the permanent workers' salary had increased to Rupees 30,000-35,000 from a meagre salary of Rupees 10,000-15,000, whereas the contract workers were paid not more than Rupees 10,000-12,000. This wage gap between permanent and contract workers persist to this day and so does the divide between them.

The third major conflict erupted in the Rico Auto Industries which is an auto components maker which supplies Fuel System Parts, Lube Oil Filters Heads and Exhaust Manifolds to major OEMs like MSIL and HMSI. It has two plants in Haryana: An old plant in Dharuhera, 50 km south of Gurgaon which came in the late 1980s as a major supplier of components to MSIL (formerly MUL), and a new plant in Gurgaon which was set up in early 2000. Faced with work conditions and low wages, workers demanded a union, wage raise. and went on a strike in September 2009 in the Gurgaon plant.[57] Immediately after workers struck, 16 permanent workers were suspended. During a protest demonstration in October, one worker died of police firing (Srivastava and Ghosh, 2009). Thousands of workers blocked the National Highway 8 in protest against the death of the worker. Workers from the plants located in close proximity such as Sona Koyo Steering Systems Ltd, Lumax Industries Ltd, Bajaj Auto Ltd and Hero Honda Motors Ltd, Sunbeam Ltd joined the protests in large numbers.

[57] The account of the conflict draws on Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar (FMS) reports, and conversations with unions involved in the strike.

Although the newspapers put the number of protesting workers at 8,000-10,000, activists and union members[58] remarked that the number was way higher, and more than 50,000 workers blocked for a day the National Highway 8, the lifeline of Delhi-Mumbai Industrial corridor. By blocking this highway, the protesting workers caused a major disruption in the movement of vehicles. The Rico Industries was also a major supplier of components to GM and Ford. The strike caused massive disruption in the supply chain and forced shutdown of several factories of GM and Ford in North America (Chaudhury and Gulati, 2009). The strike ended on November 5, 2009 when the management recognised the union, and the suspended workers were taken back. The Rico strikes provided an opportunity to workers to beyond the plant and engage in solidarity strikes. However, the settlement excluded the demands of contract workers for a pay hike. The Rico union did not affiliate with any CTU and remains independent to this day.

The three strikes in the auto belt are important in a number of ways. Although this auto-cluster did not have a history of labour movements and remained outside of the traditional centres of trade union activity, these strikes defined working class politics in the region before the Maruti's Manesar workers struck in 2011. The conflicts in Maruti's Gurgaon plant, HMSI's plant in Manesar and Rico's Gurgaon plant influenced Maruti's Manesar plant workers' consciousness and subsequent actions in uneven and contradictory ways. The next section highlights these contradictory effects on workers' consciousness. While the strike at the Gurgaon plant and its defeat and ultimate dismissal of a militant union discouraged a section of workers to take up union activities, the success of Honda and Rico strikes strengthened the majority of workers resolve to fight for a union in order to get better working conditions, and a raise in wages.

[58] The union members from Rico, HMSI, AITUC, and Sunbeam argued that without the presence of a large number of workers (50,000), they would have faced more police brutality like workers did in HMSI in 2005.

5.3 Union formation

The union formation process at the Manesar plant was primarily led by the permanent workers who numbered over 1,000 by early 2011. The Honda union was a model union for the workers. Workers were enthused by the gains (wage raise) made by the union and the benefits it had secured (transport facilities, providing reliever, health insurance, gratuity, housing loan) for the permanent workers. The contract workers, however, held contradictory views on the need for a union and its usefulness to them. Those contract workers who had worked in other plants before working at the Manesar plant and were conscious of trade union politics in the region, did not believe in the usefulness of a union. On the other hand, the contract workers whose first employment was at the Manesar plant or had entered the labour market recently, believed a union could help them getting a permanent job. This conflict was mainly driven by the weak deals contract workers got in settlements between the union and the managements in Manesar and Gurgaon. For instance, during settlements between the unions and the management in HMSI, and auto parts maker Rico Industries in Gurgaon, the contract workers' interests (wage hike, transport facilities) were ignored despite standing with the unions during conflicts with the management. Based on their experience of trade union politics, the contract workers believed that their interests and the interests of the permanent workers did not converge. "Nothing will happen, even if they do politics [unionisation], they will not do anything for us" was the common refrain among contract workers. However, there was another section of contract workers who believed that having a union in the plant would help them becoming permanent. There was growing discontent among contract workers against the labour contractors. Sudhir, a contract worker from Uttar Pradesh remarked, "If we were directly recruited by Maruti and if our job was permanent, the situation would have been different. The only way we could be permanent was through a

union." The contract workers despised the labour contractors and wanted an unmediated relation with the management which they believed could be achieved through a union.

In the midst of enthusiasm among permanent workers and mixed scepticism among contract workers, the union formation process started in January-February, 2011, led by the permanent workers. These workers had not participated in a strike or any other form of collective struggle. Industrial strikes in the automobile belt had remained localised and the region (Gurgaon, IMT Manesar, Dharuhera) remained untouched by the general strikes called by the CTUs every year.[59] In addition, the majority of the workers were young and were working for the first time in an industry and had not faced any management resistance to political actions. However, they were aware of the defeat of the strike in the Gurgaon plant in 2000-01, a frequent reference point among workers. The conversation among workers inevitably turned to the power of the "mighty" Maruti management and the subsequent derecognition of the union after the strike. They were aware of the possible vindictive actions by the MSIL such as getting fired or suspended on disciplinary grounds; however, they also saw a better future through a union. Workers expressed this sentiment during a conversation with me in Manesar village:

> You see the Gurgaon Maruti movement [the 2000-01 strike] was crushed after almost 90 days of strike when the union was strong and Mathew Abraham[60] was the leader. We thought if they couldn't do anything, what could we do? (Mohit, August 11, 2014)

[59] The CTUs call a general strike every year to protest against anti-labour policies of the central government. These strikes, however, have not evoked strong participation of industrial workers, particularly in Gurgaon and Manesar. And these strikes have remained largely ineffective in influencing the policies of the state.
[60] Mathew Abraham was the President of MSIl's Gurgaon plant in the 1990s and during the 2000-01 strikes. He was considered a militant union leader who did not give in the pressures from management and fought for workers' rights in the plant. He was terminated from the Gurgaon plant after the strike was defeated.

> We were also scared that they would remove us from our jobs. But then we also thought that even now we are working like animals and living like animals. How? Very clear, when you get such a low wage, where else would you stay except in those small crowded rooms with just two bathrooms and one latrine for 15 rooms. We thought that we should try to get a union. We were young. We thought [that] if they throw us out, we will look for a new job, but we will not surrender without even trying. (Ashok, September 17, 2015)

The permanent workers held a meeting in a park in Gurgaon in which they selected an eleven-member union executive led by Sonu Gujjar and Shiv Kumar. According to Satish, a terminated permanent worker, Sonu Gujjar and Shiv Kumar who were selected as president and general secretary because "(t)hey spoke for 30 minutes on why we needed a union. They had leadership qualities and we rallied behind them." In order not to attract the attention of the management, the workers adopted several creative ways to communicate with each other. Khusiram, a terminated permanent worker, narrated the strategies of communication with fellow workers:

> We were secretive about our conversations. For instance, if I am a good friend of yours, I will not talk to you inside the company. In fact, I will pick up fights with you to show that we are not friends. But after we finish our shifts, we would talk about different things [about a union]. We talked to workers we trusted because we didn't want any information to reach the management. (August 18, 2014)

Another strategy was to make use of what I would call micro-spaces of worker politics. Khusiram explained: 'I will go to a friend's room; he will come to my room. We started talking in small groups about the importance of a union. We used to talk in the bus after our shifts'.

With no prior knowledge of the legal processes involved in filing a union application, the workers discussed with other unions in the auto-region (Manesar and Gurgaon). They, however, did not seek any support from the MUKU because of its reputation as a "pocket" union (company union) and its refusal to take up their grievances with the management in the past. In addition, they feared that MUKU would divulge their plans to the management. Until then no efforts had been made by any CTU to organise workers in the Manesar plant as they (the CTUs) also considered MUKU as the representative of workers in the Manesar plant as well. The initial attempts made by smaller labour organisations like *Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra* (Revolutionary Workers' Centre) (IMK) did not elicit a response from the workers. "When we distributed pamphlets for a [separate] union in October-November, 2010," Shyamveer from IMK said, "the workers did not take us seriously despite being unhappy and angry with work conditions and low wages." Apprehension about the usefulness of a union also surfaced when the need for a union gained grounds among permanent workers. As a worker who had worked in the Gurgaon plant before joining the Manesar plant, asked, "What if the new union becomes another pocket union like MUKU? I didn't think anything was going to change because of a union."

Yet, more workers were convinced of the need for a union, and the HMSI union had a major influence on the workers. Spatial proximity to the HMSI plant and its workers, and a reputation of an "assertive union" gained after forming a union in 2005 following a bitter struggle with the management shaped the Maruti workers' politics and strategies. "We wanted a union like Honda" was a common reference point among the Maruti workers. Jitender, a terminated permanent worker, described the reasons for being inspired by the HMSI union:

> We didn't know about the central unions like CITU, HMS, and AITUC. We didn't know what was a dependent union, what was an independent union. We didn't have

> any experience in union politics The Honda plant was closer to our plant and they had a strong union, so we contacted [Suresh] Gaur. We wanted a union like Honda. The union body has done good work for the workers; their [monthly] salary had increased a lot [after the union was established], from 6-7,000 to 30,000 rupees [for permanent workers]. They are so many facilities for the workers and all this was possible because of a strong union. Honda union was a model for us. (Jitender, July 10, 2015)

The workers led by Sonu Gujjar sought help from HMSI union president Suresh Gaur on legal issues in filing a union application in the labour department in Chandigarh. The HMSI union advised the Maruti workers to get affiliated with AITUC (affiliated with CPI) in order to take advantage of its significant presence in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon.[61] The workers were also told that AITUC-affiliated unions in the region would support the Maruti workers, if the union demand was not accepted by the management. The union representatives Sonu Gujjar and Shiv Kumar met with the Honda union leaders and AITUC functionaries in Gurgaon to chalk out a strategy. On June 3, 2011, the Maruti workers went to Chandigarh[62] along with HMSI representatives and AITUC officials to file a union application with the Labour Department. With the filing of the application, the workers completed a process that had begun in early months of 2011. The workers were hopeful that they would get their union registered as they went along with a powerful plant-based union HMSIEU and AITUC, a CTU with a significant presence in the region.

[61] The data on how many unions are affiliated with AITUC and other CTUs in Gurgaon and IMT Manesar is not available. Multiple visits to the AITUC office did not yield any results. Anil Kumar, an AITUC senior functionary in Gurgaon said that more than 50 unions are affiliated with AITUC in Gurgaon and IMT Manesar. This information could not be independently verified, but there is a perception in the automobile belt that AITUC has more unions than any other CTU in the region, which includes HMS and CITU.

[62] Chandigarh serves as administrative capital for two provinces, Haryana and Punjab.

5.4 The 13-day strike: The first awakening

The Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) filed an application with the Labour Department in Chandigarh on June 3, 2011.[63] The preparation for registering a separate union independent of MUKU involved countless discussions between the HMSIEU, AITUC officials and the Maruti workers. On June 4, the labour department informed the management about the union application and sought to verify whether the signatures on the application were authentic. In order to prevent the formation of a new union, the management drafted a letter which stated that Manesar workers had agreed to remain with MUKU, the management-promoted union, and not form a separate union. The supervisors circulated this letter on the shop floor and pressurised workers in the A shift to sign the letter. "*Netagiri* [politics] won't be accepted in the Manesar plant," said supervisors while trying to collect signature from workers.

Agitated over the letter, the workers (A shift) left their work stations and gathered near the Human Resources (HR) department to protest against collecting signatures by force and asked the management to withdraw the letter. The management refused. It insisted on signatures on the letter and reiterated that no separate union would be allowed in the plant. Workers began raising slogans against the management, "Maruti management down down, give us our union." While the A shift workers continued raising slogans and did not leave the plant after the end of the shift, the B shift workers joined them. By the late afternoon on June 4, the strength of workers inside the plant had swelled to more than 2000, according to Pawan, a permanent worker. After deliberating among themselves, the workers decided to stop production until the management withdrew the letter and apologised. Hundreds of state

[63] The Trade Unions Act, 1926, lays down that any seven members of a union on the payroll of a firm may make an application for registration of the union. No trade union can be registered unless 10 per cent or 100 workers-whichever is less-are employed by the establishment or the firm. However, recognition of a union is not mandatory for the firm, and depends on the Standing Order of that particular firm in which a union is sought to be formed.

police personnel entered the plant, but they failed to deter workers to leave. Workers struck to their demands and continued the sit-in occupation. It was first such experience for the Maruti workers when they came face to face with the management and the police. When MSEU contacted the HMSIEU for their advice, they were told to resume production and leave the factory after their shift ended.[64] Instead of a direct confrontation, the HMSIEU union advised the Maruti workers to vacate the plant and file a case in the labour court against unlawful management practices. The workers did not heed to this advice. By the late evening, the demand to withdraw the letter had transformed into a demand for a separate union. Satish, a terminated permanent worker said,

> The Honda union asked us not to do anything stupid but, we decided that we won't leave the factory without a [registration] number. All of us [permanent, contract, apprentices, trainees and casual workers] agreed. It was a sudden decision. (Satish, July 28, 2014)

This action has been termed as "factory occupation" by workers and labour activists. The workers kept saying, "*humne factory pe kabja kar liya* [we occupied the factory]." Reminiscing the spontaneous nature of the strike, Khusiram, a terminated worker said:

> We thought nothing was going to happen unless we stopped production. How did this idea come to our minds? As all the focus of the management was on increasing production, we thought if this was so important, then we should do something about it. Until then, there had never been a tool down or slowing down of production by workers in the Manesar plant. Everyone was surprised; we ourselves couldn't believe that we occupied the factory. (Khusiram, August, 18, 2014)

[64] The Maruti workers did not have the experience of the legal provisions of filing a union application. Also, in the absence of support from the Maruti's Gurgaon union MUKU, the workers relied on HMSIEU for advice on legal issues as well as political support which was promised in case the legal process does not lead to the formation of a union.

The management took steps to diffuse the situation and started a dialogue with workers on June 5, second day of the strike. Pradeep, a permanent worker said, "They told us that we are like a family, Maruti family and we should resolve this issue by talking and not striking." Efforts like this did not yield any result and the strike continued. Power connections were cut off inside the plant and a mobile jammer was put in place by the management in connivance with the police. The workers went without food for two days. In order to prevent further escalation, food supply from outside was permitted after two days on June 6. To pressure workers, phone calls were made to their families. As the news of occupation spread in the industrial belt, ordinary workers, trade union leaders, and family members of the striking workers gathered at the factory gate. The union ensured that no one from outside came to start production by deploying workers in different departments and assembly line. Responsibilities were distributed for tasks such as getting water for other workers, tending to sick workers and communicating with trainees, contract workers and apprentices about their demands. A number of workers became shop coordinators, who formed a link between the union and the ordinary workers.

On June 6, the management suspended the union members including Shiv Kumar and Sonu Gujjar on grounds of inciting workers to go on a strike and illegally staying inside the factory. Meanwhile, the workers considered writing a letter to the Chairman of Suzuki Motors Corporation (SMC) Osamu Suzuki to inform him about their plight and believed that he would grant them a union. They held the management responsible for the impasse but expected the CEO Shinzo Nakanishi to intervene and resolve the conflict. As Vivek, a permanent worker put it:

> In Hindu *shastra* [scriptures], *maalik* [owner] and *majdoor* [worker] are part of the same thing, but *prabandhak* [management] is the outsider. They are the ones who create all sorts of problems for workers. Once we decided to form a union, we

> believed that we would be able to convey our troubles to the owners. They would understand us and our issues and give us our union. Some of us even wrote a letter to Suzuki telling him how we were treated and that we needed a union, but nothing happened. (Vivek, October 27, 2015)

The workers demanded increased wages, more incentives, and reduction in work intensity. Even as the strike continued in the Manesar plant, workers in another plant (the Gurgaon plant) demanded a representative union and elections. In order to placate the Gurgaon workers and pre-empt any solidarity strike, the management announced union elections for MUKU in August 2011. Union elections were announced for the first time in a decade after the old union was busted following the conflict in 2000-01. While the announcement pacified the permanent workers in the Gurgaon plant, the struggles in the Manesar plant continued. On June 8, the central trade union federations and unions in Gurgaon-Manesar formed a Trade Union Council (TUC) to support the strike and mobilise workers in the region. The TUC which gave a call for a gate meeting on June 9. Rajkumar, a member of the TUC and president of the RICO union, Dharuhera said that the gate meeting witnessed participation of more than 10,000 workers which he considered "an unbelievable development in the region." Following this meeting, the TUC held a one-day *Satyagraha* (an act of civil disobedience) in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Gurgaon on June 10 and demanded the revocation of suspension of the eleven-member union executive as well as a safe passage of workers from the plant without coercive intervention by the police. Ironically, the union demand of the workers took a back seat for the TUC.

Although the CTUs played a major role in organising support for the Maruti workers initially, the smaller labour organisations were not far behind. In fact, they insisted on no compromise with the demand for a separate union. While the majority of workers mobilised

by the CTUs were permanent workers, a number of smaller organisations[65] like *Bigul Mazdoor Dasta* (BMD), *Krantikari Naujawan Sabha* (KNS), and *Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra* (Revolutionary Workers' Centre) (IMK) mobilised support for the Maruti workers among contract workers in different working-class localities s in Gurgaon and Manesar. The activists from BMD complained of being attacked by villagers while trying to mobile support for the Maruti workers in different workers' dormitories. A similar incident was reported by IMK activists who were distributing pamphlets in support of Maruti workers.

As the strike entered the seventh day on June 10, the Haryana government declared it illegal seeing "hidden political hand in the strike" (Banerjee, 2011). The government, however, did not force workers to leave the factory premises. The management was also reluctant to use force given the risk of damage in the plant. However, declaring the strike illegal meant that the management had the prerogative to cut two days' wage for every day of strike as per the policy of "no work no pay" stated in the company Standing Order. The workers were not prepared for such an intervention by the state. In exchange for calling off the strike, the management offered to increase wages and set up an umbrella governing council with representatives from the management, MUKU members as well as workers from the Manesar plant to decide on company policies in future to avoid workers' unrest (Times of India, June 12, 2011). The workers rejected the offer fearing dilution of their demands through this council, and believed that MUKU would compromise with their demands and break the unity among the striking workers. Moreover, they were apprehensive that a council with MUKU members and management officials would compromise with their autonomy to fight for and represent Manesar workers' voices.

[65] These smaller organisations played an important role in organising worker who had been thoroughly demoralised after the onslaught launched by the state post-Jyly 18, 2012. While Bigul is active with informal workers in East Delhi, IMK has a presence among workers in Faridabad and industrial areas of Rudrapur, Uttarakhand. KNS is a student organisation formed in 2010 and many of its activists joined the Maruti movement and continue to do support workers' movements in the region.

Even as the strike continued, AITUC official D.L. Sachdev made the following statement:

> We want it [the dispute] to be resolved. Even the workers are anxious to restart production. Hopefully some solution will be found...normalcy should prevail and *we will persuade the workers to make up for this loss of production by working extra hours or on holidays*. (CNBC, June,13, 2011, quoted in Gurgaon Workers News, No 8).

Sachdev continued, presenting a characterisation of his union:

> AITUC wants industrial development to take place in Haryana. We are not against FDI but we feel the MNCs *should respect our national laws and should allow our workers to form their own union.* (CNBC, June,13, 2011, quoted in Gurgaon Workers News, No 8).

The above statement powerfully expressed and exposed the ideology of AITUC considered to be the most militant among the centra trade unions in the region. This ideology was clearly based on legalism. AITUC advised the striking workers to adopt a legal path to form a union and call of the strike. On June 15, the Chief Minister of Haryana Bhupinder Hooda met top MSIL executives including Managing Director Bhargava and CEO Shinzo Nakanishi and promised them government support assuring them that a second union would not be permitted (Business Standard, 2011). The impasse in negotiations continued even as the state government clearly assured the MSIL management that the government would intervene to protect the interest of MSIL. Armed with this support, the management refused any dialogue with the workers and threatened the use of force if workers did not vacate the plant premises. The TUC (the council of unions) pressured the Maruti workers to end the strike and come out of the plant to seek a legal resolution of contentious issues. The workers did not budge from their position but the pressure was building on them to vacate the plant premises. Meanwhile,

the late AITUC General Secretary Gurudas Dasgupta declared that about 65 factories in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial region would work on empty stomach on June 17, and hold a two-hour tool-down strike on June 20 between 11 am and 1 pm to support the striking workers.[66]

With no resolution in sight, the workers' morale was on the wane. CTUs began efforts to strike a compromise between the workers and the management. A settlement was reached on June 16 after seven hours of negotiation between the management, labour department, AITUC and workers to call off the strike. The settlement contained the following measures:

- The management agreed to take back the eleven office bearers of the new union who were suspended on June 6, but enquiry proceedings would be initiated against them and "appropriate disciplinary action" would be taken if found guilty.
- Deduction of two days' wages for each day of the strike.
- There will be additional pay cuts if workers showed any sign of indiscipline over the next two months.
- The workers agreed to maintain discipline, ensure expected levels of production and not indulge in any individual or collective activities that would hamper the normal functioning of the factory.
- Against the earlier policy of no paid leave, the settlement provided for 15 days' paid leave for workers.
- The management also agreed not to behave badly or hold grudges against the workers. The agreement was to be taken as a final resolution of all disputes between the workers and the management.

[66] Personal interview with Gurudas Dasgupta, June 23, 2014.

While the management did not come up with a number on the loss to the company because of the strike, financial presses put a number on the loss. Banerjee and Sharma (2011) reported that Manesar plant had a production loss of 12,400 units amounting to roughly Rupees 4200 million. However, workers' capacity to strike at the profit of the company did not enter the discourse of struggle. The issue of union formation took a backseat, and status quo was maintained in the plant. The smaller labour organisations (IMK, Bigul, KNS) advocated a more confrontational approach and advised workers against accepting the terms of the settlement and ending the strike without any assurance about the union formation. They also advised the workers to raise the issue of work intensity, low wages, longer breaks and transport facilities for non-permanent workers. There was discontent among workers on the settlement which was expressed in the following words:

> We listened to the advice by the AITUC and agreed on the settlement. We had to listen to them because they have more power and experience than us. Although we had decided not to leave the factory premises before getting our registration number, we did not have a choice. AITUC insisted that we leave [the factory] or forget about the union. (Vinod, August 19, 2015)

Another worker said:

> After five-six days of occupying the factory, the workers got demotivated. AITUC and other TUC members told us that such actions would not get us anything. Initially we thought we do not need these unions but after the strike was declared illegal by the government, we were a little scared of what is going to happen. We were confused, we argued among ourselves but ultimately decided that it was best to vacate the premises. Sometimes we thought AITUC was supporting us, but many of us also

> thought it is not supporting us and all it wanted was membership fees. (Satpal, September 9, 2015)

Expressing dissatisfaction and confusion on the settlement, Rajveer, a permanent worker said:

> We were suspicious of the settlement but we had to sign it because there was a lot of pressure from all sides [government, CTUs]. After the settlement Sonu and Shiv along with other union members talked to CTUs. Our relationship with AITUC had strained as we no more believed in Gaur... he was playing politics with us. We were told by the unions [TUC members] that we should not be reckless and must act according to their advice. We had to believe them. Some activists would come and tell us to do this and that but we thought it is better to listen to the unions rather than people who have no power. (Rajveer, August 28, 2014)

If there was so much of discontent among workers, then why did they agree to the terms of the settlement? Apart from pressure from the government and the trade unions, the workers considered settlement a pragmatic move. Satish justified workers' position when he said,

> We thought how we would fight if we lost our leaders. Even though we knew that there was nothing in the settlement on our union we asked Sonu to agree to their condition. Yes, we didn't get much, but how can you fight without leaders? (Satish, July 28, 2014)

Ramniwas agreed "After Sonu and Shiv were suspended, Gaur and Sachdeva told us that our first job is to get our workers back and they will take up our case with the CM. We thought they were right" (Ramniwas, July 29, 2014). On the surface, the strike did not yield any result for the workers. The demand for a union was refused and reduction in work intensity and the

issue of wages did not even figure in the negotiations. So, what did the wildcat strike achieve? The workers dismissed the idea that the strike was a failure. A permanent worker said,

> Some activists told us that we got nothing and the trade unions betrayed us. But look I do not know if this is true or not, but before the strike we had absolutely no knowledge of how to fight. But now we know. (Dhimaan Singh, August 17, 2014)

Along with the confidence to take on the biggest automaker in India, workers talked about emerging solidarity and new bonds of friendship, Vinod said, "I never cared for a union. I used to just work in the plant and come back to my room. Never interreacted much with others. But during the strike I thought 'I have been transformed from I to we'" (Vinod, November 19, 2015).

Workers also emphasised the importance of self-activity when Satish said, "The strike taught us that unless we fight for ourselves, no one is going to help us." The occupation provided an opportunity to workers to talk with each other and share their work experiences openly. Inside the plant they were busy working in different work stations, and outside the plant time was spent on commuting, cooking and getting ready for the next day. The constraints of everyday life, both inside and outside of the plant, had prevented the workers from sharing their experiences which became possible during the strike. Speaking of the exchange of experiences in the plant, Pradeep a permanent worker, said:

> We started [during the occupation] sharing our experiences with others openly from the stage. We talked about how we were treated in the factory. If there is fault in the production line, the worker will be made *murga* in the line [forced to sit in a peculiar position which is painful) ... someone was made to stand the whole day raising his hand for a minor mistake. We were punished for very small things. These instances

> came out openly. Although we were working in the same plant, we never got an opportunity share our feelings like this, openly. We talked about how this supervisor did this, that manager behaved badly.…We just did not have the time to share our experiences with each other. (Pradeep, September 10, 2015)

And a result of all this sharing, Pradeep concluded: 'A new bond developed among us'.

The emerging solidarity did not exist in abstract. It had concrete manifestations. It was not confined to permanent workers alone. There was a fear among contract workers that after a union is formed, *their* demands and issues would be ignored. This fear was based on the history of union struggles in the region (HMSI, Rico Industries). Although both permanent and contract workers fought together, once the union came into being, the permanent workers pressed for their demands alone while ignoring the contract workers. During the strike in the Manesar plant, permanent workers assured contract workers of permanent jobs once the union is formed. A contract worker remarked, "They gave us their uniforms and told us that we became half-permanent now; we would become full permanent once the union is formed." These words of solidarity were not simply a matter of strategy or emerged from the leadership. It came from the rank-and-file who did not consider the hierarchy among workers legitimate.

The strike also revealed a side of the state that the workers had not anticipated. The declaration of the strike as illegal was a revelation for the workers who until then believed that the government would intervene on their behalf. When the Haryana CM declared the strike illegal, the workers were shocked. A worker remarked, "Who do you trust? The labour department, the police and even our own government is with the management and works for them. We had nothing to fall back on but our own strength, our unity and solidarity." Earlier, the workers held the supervisors, the department heads and the Maruti management

responsible for their plight in the factory. The anger was always directed against the immediate oppressors. The government and its institutions such as the labour department were considered impartial. The declaration of the strike as illegal by the CM surprised workers. Thus recounted three permanent workers who hailed from Haryana:

> When we heard the news that our strike has been declared illegal by the Hooda government, we found it difficult to digest. Is he working for people who elected him or for the *Maliks* [owners] who are against people? (Rajiv Kumar, November 18, 2015)

> We didn't understand why the government declared our strike illegal and asked us to vacate the factory? Some people said the government was getting money from the management, but who elected him [the CM] to power? (Ajit, November 18, 2015)

> Now we know who is on whose side. We thought Hooda (the CM) would tell the company to accept our demand, but the opposite happened. We decided not to vacate the factory. We thought if we were together, no one could do anything and we would get our union. (Ajmair, November 18, 2015)

The above quotes point to a transformation in workers' consciousness: While workers had thought the government, elected by them, would work in their favour, they began suspecting the class bias of the government upon the government declaration of the strike as illegal. Participation in political processes and the discourse that it generates and a number of welfare measures helps the political class and the state in India gain the trust of the working people (Roy, 2023). This trust, however, breaks down during periods of intense class conflict. The strike manifested the breakdown of the trust of the workers in the state and its institutions and represented a gradual transition from a state of consciousness where workers were only conscious of their antagonism with the immediate oppressors (the supervisors and the

management) to a consciousness of the state acting in the interests of capital. Workers thus became conscious of their class opponents during the course of the struggle and no longer considered the state as a neutral arbiter.

The CTUs disapproved of workers' actions and suggested throughout the strike to adopt a legal approach to get their union. The sit-in occupation of the plant went against the trade union political action in the region which followed a path of legalism and playing by the rules. The Maruti workers' spontaneous action was a point of departure for both the ordinary workers in the region and the trade unions. A perception gained ground among workers from other plants in IMT Manesar that they could also do something similar to press for their demands. Speaking of the strike, Ram Prasad, a union president in two-wheeler maker Enticer located in IMT Manesar, said

> When the strike began, we thought it would be over in two days, but it continued. They held on for 13 days, which was an inspiration for all of us. They were not scared of the police, the management, and the government. Many of us thought if Maruti workers could do it, why couldn't we? (Ram Prasad, October 17, 2015)

This view was echoed by labour activist Amit who said, "It felt as if the factory occupation woke up workers in the region. Although AITUC mobilised support for the workers, workers in the region came to the gate meetings on their own." This sense of confidence and spontaneous solidarity stood in contrast to what the trade union thought of the strike. Speaking of the strike HMS functionary Jaspal Rana said,

> HMS always supports workers but you can't do something like this [factory occupation]. This is *childish*…this is against basic principles of trade unionism. I have always believed that for a company to run workers and management will have to work together in harmony. (Jaspal Rana, July 14, 2015)

Comrade Murali, a AITUC official based in Gurgaon could not agree more when he remarked, “Trade unionism is always about give and take. Workers cannot just occupy the factory and force the management to grant them a union. You need a lot of patience.” Different social actors looked at the strike from different vantage points. These vantage points were consolidated further as the struggle in the plant progressed.

5.5 The Lockout: Workers’ Resilience Consolidated

After the strike ended, the management brought in spiritual trainers and a religious sect known as *Brahmakumaris* to organise sessions with workers in order to begin a “healing process” (Shruthijith and Chauhan, 2011). These efforts yielded no results. The strike changed the dynamic on the shop floor in a limited way. The supervisors had stopped abusing workers who had become more assertive and opposed earlier practices of punishment for minor mistakes at work stations. However, the management could not let go of its control and domination over the workers. It began penalising workers who were at the forefront of the strike. In violation of the settlement, three day’s salary was deducted for each day of strike which effectively meant workers lost 39 day’s salary for the 13-day strike (Panchal, 2011). The union members were called to the HR department frequently and blamed for not fulfilling production targets. Work-stations and shifts were changed every week, and by mid-July the supervisors resumed abusing workers. In a news conference in Tokyo, the CEO of Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC), Osamu Suzuki said that MSIL would not recognise a second labour union in the Manesar plant (Standards, 2011). Meanwhile, in a meeting in early July to strategize the future course of action, the TUC (formed to coordinate the unions in the region) told the workers not to engage in “illegal” activities like factory occupation and follow a legal path to form a union. Despite the ambiguous attitude of workers towards the CTUs and the TUC, the Maruti workers relied on them more than the smaller labour organisations who advocated a more militant and confrontational approach. These

organisations remained at the periphery of the unfolding struggle and could not exert any ideological influence on workers' consciousness. It was the CTUs who held more influence of workers despite their conciliatory tone. Although workers in IMT supported the strike in large numbers by participating in gate meetings, the Maruti workers did not realise the potential of such support, and continued to rely more on the CTUs in their struggle because of their ability to provide legal assistance and a perception of their ability to mobilise workers in large numbers.

The strike and the ongoing conflict in the Manesar plant had a demonstration effect on other plants. Over 10,000 workers gathered near the HMSI plant on July 25 to mark the anniversary of police crackdown on HMSI workers in 2005. July 25 is celebrated as Workers' Solidarity Day since 2006. While in the previous year only 2500-3000 workers participated, the high number of worker participation in 2011 was attributed to the strike in the Manesar. Arvind Yadav, a union member in HMSI said, "The Maruti strike did something to workers. They came on their own to our anniversary day, while earlier we had to go out to every plant and ask workers to come to our event and show solidarity." Elections were held in the Gurgaon plant on August 11, 10 years after the old union was busted following a lockout 2000-01.[67] The Manesar workers' struggle in fact provided an opportunity to Gurgaon plant workers to hold elections. During the June strike in the Manesar plant, the Gurgaon plant workers had expressed solidarity by wearing black badges for 13 days; solidarity protest of this kind had not happened in the plant for a decade. Fearing a strike and to pacify the agitated workers, elections were held in the Gurgaon plant. "The

[67] The Maruti Udyog Employees Union (MUEU) was busted in 2000-01 after a three-months strike over the demans for incentives and regularisation of contract workers. In the place MUEU, the management selected a group of workers who were declared to be the new union called Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union(MUKU). Elections were not held to elect the members of this union and workers considered this union a pocket union. The union failed to get legitimacy among workers in the Gurgaon plant. The Manesar workers refused to accept this union as their representative. For more details, see Section I of chapter 4.

company didn't want another headache [in the Gurgaon plant], so they conducted elections," said Rajesh Sharma, the MUKU president.

Meanwhile, the temporary settlement in June did not bring lasting peace on the shop floor. Even as the legal process remained stalled in the labour department, workers became restive due to management's attempt to punish and demoralize workers. On July 27, the contract workers in the bumper department requested for additional workers as the workstation had only 12 workers in place of the usual 20 workers. Instead of meeting the request, the supervisor abused the workers with foul language and asked them to manage with 12 workers. This was brought to the attention of permanent workers who met the head of the bumper department to resolve this issue. Workers in other departments also complained of sudden reduction of the number of contract workers and increase in work intensity. While the management stated that the reduction is due to decrease in production, workers argued that this was a measure to extract more work from a few workers and put mental pressure on them with higher work intensity. The agitated workers threatened a tool-down strike if the management did not accept their demands of restoring the earlier strength in the work stations.

A large contingent of police force was deployed inside the plant the following day. The police took four permanent workers from the bumper department to the Manesar police station for allegedly creating disturbance in the plant. In protest against heavy police presence and demanding the return of the four workers, the A shift workers went on a sudden tool-down strike for two hours. Meanwhile, the B shift workers were not allowed to enter the gates. This decision was reversed within an hour as A shift workers threatened to go on a strike and occupy the factory like they did in June. Eventually, the B shift workers were allowed to enter the factory, and the four workers were released from the police station in the evening. The four arrested workers were suspended the following day on the grounds of

violating company discipline. Workers demanded the revocation of suspension, but the management made the revocation conditional upon accepting membership of MUKU (the Gurgaon union) and dropping the demand of a separate union. Meanwhile, the labour department rejected the union application again on three grounds: workers resorted to an illegal strike, signatories are already members of MUKU, and finally, mismatch in signatures (Singh and Sawhney, 2011). Following this decision, the management again asked workers to participate in union elections in the Gurgaon plant and offered to open a Manesar chapter of Gurgaon union, MUKU.

The harassment of workers continued even as the four workers remained suspended. The workers began discussion of another strike if the management continued harassing them. In a separate incident on August 24, an assembly line worker got sick due to exhaustion. The line supervisor refused to grant leave requested by the worker. He accused the workers of faking sickness and abused them by using foul language. When those present in the assembly line protested, two more workers were suspended. Along with the suspension of six permanent workers, a number of contract workers were removed from the job. The workers were accused of creating deliberate faults in the assembly line, and on this ground several assembly line workers were suspended. The management alleged that production fell from 1200 cars a day to 700 and only 95 cars passed the quality check (Shruthijith and Chauhan, 2011). These allegations were denied by the workers.

On August 29, a large contingent of police force was deployed at the entry gate of the plant before the A shift started. The A shift workers were denied entry into the plant. Instead, a notice read out by a management official stated that the permanent workers and the trainees could enter the plant only after signing a Good Conduct Undertaking (GCU). According to the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, any company employing over 50 workers has to formulate a charter codifying management-labour relationship. This charter is

known as the Standing Orders which governs the relation between workers and the company. As a part of this Standing Orders, any company can enforce an undertaking, if workers sabotage production. The management made use of this provision to enforce the GCU. The contract workers were asked to meet their employers and wait for further instruction, and the apprentices were sent on leave for four days. The union members were also suspended as the total number of suspended workers had increased to 44. A supervisory staff distributed printed copies of the GCU among the workers who were present at the gate. The text of the GCU read:

In terms of Clause 25(3) of the certified Standing Orders I, [worker's name], son of [father's or parents, name], do hereby execute and sign this good conduct bond voluntarily in my own volition in accordance with Clause 25(3) of the Certified Standing Orders. I undertake that upon joining my duties I shall give normal production in disciplined manner and that I shall not resort to go slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in strike, work to rule, sabotage or otherwise indulge in any activity, which would hamper normal production in the factory.

I, therefore, do hereby agree that resorting to go slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in strike, or indulging in any other activity having adverse effect on the normal production constitutes a major misconduct under the Certified Standing Orders and the punishment provided for committing such acts of misconduct includes dismissal from service without notice, under Clause 30 of the Certified Standing Orders.

I agree that I will abide by the following:

Will not neglect cleanliness
Not remain in toilet for a longer period of time
Shall not apply or obtain leave on a false pretext
Shall not participate in strike action of other unions

Shall not raise slogans inside the factory (Barnes, 2018).

Workers refused to sign the undertaking. They instead decided to sit in front of the entry gate of the plant in two 12-hour shifts. Production was disrupted for three days; partial production resumed after three days with the help of workers from the Gurgaon plant and mostly in automated areas of the factory. The sit-ins saw participation by both the permanent and contract workers. The union called a gate meeting on September 1 in which more than 5000 workers participated. The workers in other plants located in IMT Manesar were warned of disciplinary actions by their managements if found attending the gate meetings of Maruti workers. This, however, did not discourage workers from participating in large numbers. It was a spontaneous event in which apart from workers, student activists, labour organisation and CTUs also took part. Workers demanded revocation of suspension of all workers and withdrawal of the GCU. The unions gave a call for solidarity strike on September 5. The gate meeting concluded with a huge protest march through various plants located in the IMT Manesar.

While the central union federations termed the Undertaking as illegal and against labour rights, MSIL Chairperson R.C. Bhargava refuted these allegations. He said that the GCU is a part of the Standing Order of the company which had been certified by the Haryana government. He further stated, "We have followed exactly what it stipulated and I am not sure why it is unfair, how something which is legally certified becomes an unfair practice" (Hindustan Times, 2011).

Normal production was disrupted but the management put up a brave face. A senior executive said, "The two plants at Manesar [A and B] are integrated. The products made at the weld shop at the second plant are being sent for assembly at the first plant. Since the

second plant is highly automated, with the same man-hours the output there would be 30-40 percent higher. It would help us ramp up production even amidst shortage in manpower" (Business Standard, 2011b). The union refuted these claims and issued a statement that not more than 50 workers had signed the GCU. They also stated that the plant could not function with supervisors and a handful of workers. An appeal was also issued to consumers not to buy Maruti cars till workers sit at the factory gates. Even as the stalemate continued, AITUC representative D. L. Sachdeva demanded intervention by the CM to end the lockout.

Meanwhile, influenced by the struggles of Maruti workers, 600 contract workers in auto-parts manufacturer Munjal Showa Limited, Manesar, walked out on September 12. They demanded regularisation of jobs and protested against relocation of workers to other plants in India (Gurgaon, Haridwar in Uttarakhand) which basically meant the seniority principle in getting permanent employment was lost. The strike was called off after the management agreed to regularise workers who had worked at the plant for more than five years (The Economic Times, Sep 14, 2011). Gurmeet, the former president of the Munjal Showa union said, "Our management and other managements [in IMT Manesar] were scared of workers being influenced by the Maruti strikes. If workers in every factory become so brave, they [companies] can't do anything. They have to listen to workers." There was a palpable fear among automakers in IMT Manesar that the impact of the conflict at the Manesar plant could start a wave of workers' struggle.

In a significant development on 14th September, over 7,000 workers in three Suzuki plants -Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt Ltd, Suzuki Powertrain India Ltd and Suzuki Castings- went on a sit-in strike inside their plants in solidarity with the Maruti workers (Business Line, September 2011). The struggles at Maruti's Manesar plant motivated these workers to go on a strike demanding unions in their plants. Unlike the Manesar plant, the management in these three plants accepted the demands of workers and the unions were registered in August. After

getting their registration numbers, these unions affiliated with the relatively conciliatory central trade union Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) which had mediated between the management and the workers. While the HMS was against workers in these plants going on a solidarity strike, the HMS-affiliated unions and workers in Suzuki Motorcycle, Castings, and Suzuki Powertrain supported the Manesar workers by striking for two days. Apart from the sit-in strikes, the workers also took out a protest march from their respective factories to the Maruti's Manesar plant on September 15. The solidarity strikes were called off in the three plants after two days following an agreement with the respective management. The strike in the Suzuki Powertrain factory had a detrimental effect on the Manesar plant; without the engines that Powertrain produced, assembly lines in MSIL's Gurgaon and Manesar plant came to a halt. Subeh Singh, who was the president of the Suzuki Powertrain union in 2011 and was later terminated, said:

> We struck in support of the Manesar car plant workers. How could we have left our brothers' hands. We also had similar issues like low wages and a lot of work even though we had a union. But there was intense pressure on us. We were told that we already had a union. We were warned by the management not to strike. We were affiliated with HMS and senior people from HMS told us to withdraw our strike. Even the labour minister promised to us that he would talk to the management and increase our wages if we call off the strike. We withdrew the strike after two days, but promised our brothers in Maruti that if their issues are not resolved, we will go on a strike again.

With the registration of the unions in three Suzuki plants the influence of HMS began to grow with the Maruti workers. HMS took pride in the fact that it is more amenable to compromise than struggle, and this was the right way to do trade union politics. A contrast was drawn with the AITUC which was considered more conflict-oriented. A top HMS functionary in

Haryana and union president in heavy equipment maker, Joseph Cyril Bamford Excavators Ltd. (JCB) in Faridabad, said:

> Look, we are different from other unions working in Faridabad and Gurgaon. We don't believe in conflict and we always want everything to be resolved through peaceful means. The Maruti people went with some other union [AITUC] to get the registration, but see what happened. While they were fighting with the management, we got registration numbers for Suzuki Castings, Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Bike plant unions. When they [Maruti workers] saw this, they came to us. We told them we would help them if they act according to our advice. (Sajit Chowdhury, December 10, 2015)

The HMS was keen on adopting a more conciliatory approach towards the management and operate within the boundaries of the legal framework in regard to strikes. In addition, if a union could be formed by getting rid of militant workers, other workers should accept it without a fight. They also suggested workers to accept the GCU and join work. Although the AITUC also operated within legal framework, they opposed the strategy of forming a union at any cost including making compromises by accepting suspension of workers and accepting the conditions of the GCU. There was a shift among the embattled Maruti workers towards the HMS in the absence of any progress in talks on the GCU and taking back the suspended workers. Moreover, in the absence of any previous experience in trade union struggles and ideological training, the workers began wondering about more practical (conciliatory) ways to end the stalemate with the management. As a result, during a gate meeting in mid-September, Sonu Gujjar declared that it would affiliate with HMS as they had been successful in getting the three Suzuki unions registered. Pawan, a permanent worker, expressed the sentiment in the following words:

> After the strike in June, the management went back to its old ways of suspending workers, misbehaving, humiliating us. We contacted AITUC people and Gaur [HMSI union president], but they said they can't do anything until we have our own union and that we should have listened to them before occupying the factory. We didn't know what to do. When we were struggling during the lockout, the Suzuki plant workers formed unions through HMS. They told us that the management listens to the HMS and we should also be with HMS. During the lockout, Sonu and Shiv declared that once we get our union, we will go [affiliate] with the HMS. (Pawan Kumar, November 30, 2015)

However, several militant workers were unhappy with this declaration. Satish continued:

> We asked them [union] why can't we form our own union and do what we decide together? Why do we have always go to these unions [CTUs]? All they [CTUs] want is the prestige of a Maruti union's affiliation with them. The union told us we have to go by which union can get our work done and we should not be sentimental about it. We kept quiet, but we were not happy with the union's decision [to go with HMS]. (Satish, July 28, 2014)

In the face of a despotic management and striking without adequate financial support, the union members considered it pragmatic to align with the HMS, an organization that itself prioritises pragmatism over ideology, although it is associated with socialistic ideas. The HMS functionaries began negotiation with the management to end the deadlock and started persuading the workers to accept the GCU. The workers did not agree on the issue of GCU but the management made the entry of workers conditional upon signing the GCU. The government started putting pressure on the CTUs to use their influence to end the strike and find a "reasonable" solution on the issue of the GCU. Consequently, the TUC persuaded the

workers to sit on the negotiation table which the workers agreed to but reiterated their demand of withdrawal of GCU and revocation of suspension of 44 workers.

The negotiations between the workers and the management began on September 16 in the presence of labour department officials. Since the Manesar workers' union was not recognised, MUKU general secretary Kuldeep Jhangu represented the Manesar workers. The talks failed as Manesar workers stuck to their position on GCU and suspended workers. Immediately after the talks failed Sonu Gujjar and Shiv Kumar were detained by the Manesar police and were pressurised to accept the GCU and enter the factory gates. They were released when the TUC issued a call to block National Highway 8 in protest against the illegal detention. The workers continued to strike despite not getting wages for August and no expectation of a wage for September. While TUCs and other unions made some financial contributions, it was not enough to sustain the struggle as the workers had no other means to support themselves.

The political pressure on the workers increased to resume negotiation with the management. The workers, however, demanded their own union (MSEU) at the negotiating table. The management refused again; Kuldeep Jhangu from MUKU represented the Manesar workers again. Workers from the Gurgaon plant and other plants of Suzuki started reaching the factory gates of the Manesar plant on September 23 where the declared that the workers had agreed to enter negotiations with the management. While thousands of workers sat outside the Manesar plant, negotiations continued for seven days. A settlement was reached on the night of September 30 which included the following terms:

- The suspended workers (44 workers including 11 union members) will be taken back after a fair investigation conducted by the Additional Labour Commissioner, (ALC), Gurgaon. The final decision will be taken only after the investigation.

- The principle of no work, no pay will apply since August 29 when workers were locked out.
- The workers will be allowed to enter the factory only after signing the GCU.
- The workers should not engage in sloganeering failing which disciplinary action will be undertaken.
- The clause in the GCU on prohibition of participation in activities of other unions or workers was withdrawn.
- Workers will engage in normal production and will not engage in either individual or collective indiscipline, nor will they create obstacles in production. And the management will also not engage in any vindictive action against workers.
- After this settlement there will not be any disputes or conflict between these two parties and the disputes will be deemed to have ended.

The settlement ended the lockout which began on August 29. The lockout cost MSIL Rupees 5,400 million in revenue (Raj, 2011). Workers resented the settlement as it did not say anything about the union. However, political pressure from the provincial government and lack of financial support compelled them to accept the settlement. Accepting the GCU was also a strategic move by the workers. Atul, a permanent worker, remarked:

> Although we got support from other, there was no money [to continue the strike]. We collected donations but that wasn't enough. We were getting restless and urged the union to find a solution. Some of us also thought that why not go inside and see what happens. We knew what happened in the [MSIL's] Gurgaon plant. The workers were locked out for three months and still nothing happened to the company… we thought we would sign the GCU and go inside; if there arose a situation against us, we would occupy the factory again, just like we had done in June. (Atul Kumar, September 25, 2015)

Workers continued to learn from the struggles in the past, and were creative in adapting to new situations. Although forming a union still eluded the workers, the struggle during the lockout witnessed several remarkable achievements. In this phase of the struggle against the GCU, affiliation with HMS and revocation of suspension became major issues. During the first strike and sit-in occupation, the workers remained more or less isolated from other workers in the IMT Manesar region. However, during the lockout, there was intense interaction among workers from several plants in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon on work conditions, low wage, the precarious situation of contract workers, and violation of basic trade union rights. The lockout also provided an opportunity to strengthen the bond between the permanent and contract workers as the entire workforce remained locked out. Very few broke the ranks and went inside the plant. The Maruti workers registered their defiance openly. Contrary to the claims of the management, production came to a standstill.

The solidarity strikes were also an important event in the industry as well as in the automobile landscape. The lockout served a dual purpose for the Maruti workers: first, it was an occasion for common workers in the region to express solidarity with the Maruti workers; second, the struggle by Maruti workers led to an open expression of similar issues in other plants. In short, although the issue at stake was the formation of a union in the Manesar plant, the struggle and its manifestation went beyond the boundaries of the Manesar plant which only intensified during the second strike which I turn to now.

5.6 The second strike and workers' growing militancy

The lockout ended with a settlement on September 30 that saw workers accepting the conditions of the GCU with some modifications, and workers were asked to join work on October 3. However, normalcy did not return to the plant as a new conflict erupted. The permanent workers resumed work in the A shift on October 3, but the contract workers, with

no explanation, were barred entry. A senior management official read a notice stating that the contract workers' services were not required and that they would get a compensation (severance) package from their respective employers (labour contractors). While not more than 150-200 out of over 1,200 contract workers accepted the offer, others rejected the compensation offer and sought the permanent workers' help in resolving the issue. Vindictive actions by the management returned to the plant as a result. On October 4, work-stations of hundreds of workers, especially the militant workers were changed, and the management made inter-departmental transfers with no consultation with workers while ignoring their skill and experience. Enraged over the changes and violations of the terms of the settlement reached to end the lockout, workers walked out after the lunch- break raising slogans and marching to the HR department. They asked the HR head to take back the contract workers, and restore permanent workers to their previous work-stations and departments. They also demanded salary for the month of August they had not been paid. In the absence of the union members who had been suspended in September, coordinators and several militant workers assumed leadership role inside the plant and began discussion with the rank-and-file on the future course of action.

Refusing to change its stand on the contract workers and the transfers inside the plant, the management asked the permanent workers to resume normal duty failing which they would be suspended. A tense situation prevailed inside the plant. Meanwhile, the barred contract workers continued to protest with slogans outside the plant. Production could only resume partially owing to the absence of the contract workers. After consultations with the suspended union members who were outside the plant, the A shift workers did not leave the plant at the end of their shift on October 7 and they were joined by the B shift workers. They coordinators and militant workers went around the factory and asked the workers to walk out from their work-stations and gather near the HR department. These workers formed a human

chain, went around the factory, and declared that they were on a strike again. While the permanent workers struck inside the plant, the contract workers struck outside and did not allow anyone to enter the plant. Effectively, the permanent and contract workers struck inside the plant.

By late evening on October 8, the unions in Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Castings and Suzuki Motorcycle India Ltd. declared strikes in their respective plants. Several Unions in Manesar such Lumax Auto, Satyam Auto Components, Endurance Technologies Ltd., Hi-Lex India Private Ltd completely halted production, and protested against their management as well as MSIL managements. More than 10,000 workers, both permanent and contractual, in these plants stood in solidarity with the striking Maruti workers and marched towards the Manesar plant. While strikes were called off in these plant on the following day due to huge pressure from the management and the local police, workers in the three Suzuki plants continued their strikes. The conflict in the Manesar plant became a rallying point for workers in the three Suzuki plants. Despite discouragement and warning from the trade union federation HMS with which they were affiliated, strikes continued in these plants in order to show solidarity with the Maruti workers. The strike at Suzuki Powertrain severely affected production in MSIL. Powertrain makes MSIL's popular diesel engines and several critical components of the petrol engine. The strike disrupted the supply chain and began to slow down production both in Manesar and Gurgaon plant. MSIL stopped production of popular models such as Swift and Dzire ahead of Diwali festivities when car sales rise in India (Shruthijith and Chauhan, 2011).

The management in the MSIL's Manesar plant pressurised workers to call off the strike, negotiate on the issue of suspended workers, and leave aside the concerns of contract workers. A call for compromise was given the central trade unions, and especially the HMS which had gained prominence among the workers during the second phase of the struggle in

September, and asked workers to call off the strike. The 16-member trade union council (TUC) passed a resolution to resolve the conflict at the earliest and asked the striking workers to come to the negotiating table. The workers refused again and their relationship with CTUs including the HMS was strained. Azmer, a permanent worker said, "Our motto was 'listen to everyone, but do what you think is best.'" The workers stuck to their demands and the strike continued despite the threat issued by the management to use force to drive out the recalcitrant workers. In response, the TUC in a gate meeting on October 13 announced a region-wide strike if force was used against the workers.

The management adopted different strategies to coerce the workers. Police raids were conducted in the homes of union member and private security personnel were hired to threaten workers' families (Sen, 2016, p, 92). In order to persuade the workers to call off the strike, senior management officials promised health care benefits for workers' families, reduced workload, and a salary raise. In return, they demanded the workers to drop the issue of contract workers but the workers insisted on taking the contract workers back. This decision by the permanent workers had created unlimited potential for future struggles and solidarity. In the words of Sanjeev, a contract worker in the Manesar plant between 2009 and 2012:

> When we heard that our brothers had rejected a good offer by the management and decided to stand by us, we were so happy. Nowhere in IMT Manesar or Gurgaon had it happened that permanent workers fought like this for the contract workers. We are friends, we are brothers. We talked among ourselves and promised to each other that we would continue our support to the permanent workers for a union, if we are taken back. (Sanjeev, November 11, 2015)

The strike continued in the Manesar plant as well as three Suzuki plants. More than 10,000 workers were on strike for over a week. This galvanised the spirit of workers. Thus narrates Amit Saini, the president of the union at Suzuki Motorcycle:

> It [the strikes] was a great moment for us. Permanent workers, contract workers-all of us were together. It was unbelievable. We never thought we could unite like this. We were united in our struggle and we decided that that no matter what we would support Maruti workers till the end. We got our union because of them; their problems were not different from our problems. (Amit Saini, October 20, 2015)

Contrary to the idea held by many academics that social or spatial identity deters workers' movement, Amit Saini explained: "We forgot who is who [caste status], we forgot who comes from Haryana and who comes from Rajasthan, who comes from other states."

Meanwhile, anticipating violence after the High Court declared the strike illegal and asked the workers to vacate the plant premises, 4,000 members of the state police force and industrial security force were deployed at the plant and over 12,000 police personnel were kept as back-up in case there is any largescale conflict in IMT Manesar (Shruthijith and Chauhan, 2011). The police personnel at the plant outnumbered the workers. Commenting on the deployment of such a huge police force, AITUC representative D. L. Sachdeva remarked, "Never in my life had I seen such a gathering of police force for a single plant. It doesn't happen even during large scale [communal] riots." It showed the fear workers had struck in the heart of the management and the state. On October 14, the Deputy Commissioner [68] of Gurgaon district went inside the plant and asked the workers to vacate the premise and sit outside as per the verdicts of the High Court. The workers formed a human chain to prevent any forceful implementation of the court order and marched around the plant. The DC started

[68] Administrative head in a district who also looks after law and order situation with assistance from the police department.

sermonising workers on why they should call off the strike immediately and vacate the plant premises. Mahavir, a terminated permanent worker reminisced the situation vividly:

> He [the DC] started speaking like a leader, 'You are good people, good workers and educated. You have been working well since last five years, you produced this much, the company gave this much of tax which will ultimately benefit you people and your families. You are getting more salary than other factories and your management is better than other managements. You have been incited by outsiders to occupy the factory. You must listen to the order of the High Court and vacate the factory. There is no other option. We will not let you play with law and order. If the company leaves you will lose your jobs and then you will have nothing to protest against.' (Mahavir, August 10, 2014)

Mahavir continued:

> Another official started talking about how our strike is against the interests of the nation because companies will now fear coming to India if we strike all the time. When the officials were leaving, one worker said, 'we listened to everything you have said now you listen to us' and we asked them why the management violated the settlement, why aren't they giving us our union. They didn't have an answer; [they] stood there quietly. (Mahavir, August 10, 2014)

After the High Court's order, workers came out and joined the striking contract workers outside the gate. The strikes in the three Suzuki plants went on for one more day and were called off on October 15. Thousands of workers from these plants marched towards the Manesar plant by overcoming a huge police cordon. The TUC started putting pressure on the striking workers to begin talks with the management. Jaspal Rana from HMS remarked, "we told the workers to immediately start talks with the management and forget about the contract

workers. Or else even the permanent jobs will also be gone." The Maruti workers refused to heed this advice and stuck to their position on contract workers. Thousands of workers stayed put outside the Manesar plant and raised slogans against the MSIL and the state government which occurred for the first time. Workers took out a march every evening, touching all the major plants in IMT Manesar. The support for the Maruti workers increased exponentially, and workers from several other plants joined them. The support they received in IMT Manesar was overwhelming even for the Maruti workers. The reason which galvanised support for the Maruti workers was the issue of contract workers which found resonance among several thousands of workers in the region. Ramniwas, a militant worker, described the situation in the following words:

> When we started our march on October 15, we had workers from our plant and three Suzuki plants. There were some CTU leaders as well. But as we walked around different plants in IMT Manesar, workers from different plants used to stop working, walk out of the plants and join us. It was unbelievable. In a gate meeting on October 16, there were more than 50-60 thousand workers. At that moment we thought that we would definitely get a union, we would change the entire system. (Ramniwas, July 28

Shyamveer, IMK, saw a radical potential in the support workers received. He remarked,

> When was the last time when workers in three plants [three Suzuki plants] struck in support of workers in one plant? When was the last time, thousands of workers came out spontaneously in support of workers in another plant? It was remarkable; it made the CTUs irrelevant in the region for some time. (Shyamveer, August 5, 2014)

Clearly, a militant and radical potential was recognised by Shyamvir, a class-conscious labour activist. In contrast, D. L. Sachdev of AITUC offered a different opinion when he remarked,

> It is true that even we were surprised by the support the Maruti workers received. The [Maruti] issue became a common issue for workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar region. But we also feared that the government won't accept the situation and use force to disperse the workers. So, we advised the Maruti workers to start talks. (D.L. Sachdev, August 19, 2014)

While thousands of workers flocked to the Manesar plant, the central trade unions appealed to the government (the Haryana CM) to resolve the crisis. Instead of intensifying the struggle, the CTUs and the TUC, the umbrella organisation representing many unions, asked for state intervention and finding a solution through talks and not struggle. A rumour spread among workers that police would not hesitate to fire at workers if they did not disperse. Workers, however, were sceptical about this news. Yogesh, a permanent worker said, "If they went to court to get an order against us, why would they use force now when we are sitting outside the plant?" However, a climate of uncertainty prevailed among workers with the increasing pressure from the CTUs to sit on the negotiating table with the management. After hectic discussions with workers and the CTUs, Sonu Gujjar declared in a gate meeting on October 17 that the union would participate in a tripartite talk with the management and the labour department. The talks began on October 19 in the Haryana Urban Development Agency (HUDA) guest house. Unlike the talks held in September, however, the Manesar workers were represented by Sonu Gujjar and Shiv Kumar and not by the representatives of MUKU, the company-promoted union in Gurgaon. The guest house was cordoned off by the police and hundreds of police personnel were deployed before the talks began. Sonu and Shiv were kept in a separate room. Their phones were taken away. While the talks continued for three days, they were not allowed to talk to any outsider, including family members, fellow workers and the CTUs. As one former union member said, "they were not allowed to go to the toilet without policemen accompanying us. They [police] told them that it was a

government order not to let the union speak to outsiders before a settlement." Parallel talks were also held with the unions of Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Castings; the unions were held captive by the police until a settlement was reached. Finally, settlements were reached with the MSIL's Manesar workers, Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Castings workers on October 21. The terms of the settlement included the following:

- The management agreed to take back 64 workers who had been suspended during the lockout in September. However, domestic enquiry would be held against 30 workers including the 11 union members. In case the decision is against any worker the workers will accept it and not engage in any tool down strike, sit-in-strike, or any other forms of protest against the decision. The suspension of the remaining 14 workers were revoked with immediate effect.
- The principle of 'no work no pay' will be applicable from October 7 till October 21.
- It was also decided that the management will talk to the contractors to continue the condition which prevailed on August 29, 2011 and the contract workers will be taken back.
- Two committees-Grievance Redressal and Labour Welfare would be set up to provide a harmonious working environment at the plant. A Grievance Redressal Committee will have representation from management and workers. Also, a labour officer from the state government will be a permanent invitee to the committee and will review its proceedings. The agreement also provides for the setting up of a labour welfare committee to promote measures for good relation between the management and workers. The committee will comprise of members from the management and the workers.
- The management promised better transport facilities, improved food quality in the canteen, and health insurance for permanent workers.

Once again, the question of a separate union – a union separate from the Gurgaon-based union MUKU and independent of the management -- remained outside of the settlement; it was only the most immediate issues which were sought to be resolved in the talks. The strike was called off in the Manesar plant on October 21 following which the unions in the three Suzuki plants also called off strikes in their respective plants. The rank-and-file believed that the 30 suspended workers including the union members would join work in ten days after an enquiry. However, the situation looked increasingly uncertain as Sonu Gujjar did not read out the settlement to workers. The general secretary, Shiv Kumar did not go to the stage to announce future course of action as has been the practice since the first settlement after the 13-day strike in June. Some members of the 30 suspended workers read out the broad agreements of the settlement and provided vague answers when asked about the discussions on union formation. In addition, there was no sloganeering after parts of the settlement were read out by some leading militant workers. All these developments made workers suspicious of the settlement and the union. Workers were perplexed by the muted response of the union after the talks.

In the midst of an uncertain situation, workers including the contract workers, resumed work on October 22. On the same day, a senior management official announced measures the management had decided to implement following the settlement: sharing profit with workers, increasing salary of all categories of workers, and reaching an wage agreement with the permanent workers in April 2012. The official also declared that instead of a union, a Workers' Committee would be set up to address workers' grievances. These verbal promises coming immediately after a settlement surprised worker. When asked why all these promises and assurances were not included in the settlement, the official resorted to the existence of "goodwill" and "good faith" and said that a written document did not mean much if a harmonious bond existed between workers and the management. Workers were

confused following these announcements and unexpected benevolence. The rhythm of production took over and workers began doing their assigned work in different work-stations. An unexpected situation awaited workers the following day.

There were rumours in the plant that the union members had agreed that they would not press for a separate union and that they would work with the Works Committee and MUKU to deal with Manesar workers' concerns. Workers assembled inside the plant at the end of A shift and raised concerns about the rumours. There was no way to confirm what they were hearing as the 30 suspended workers were outside the plant; they had also switched off their phones. Neither the CTUs nor the TUC came forward with any statement on what transpired during the settlement that forced the exit of 30 workers. Ram Niwas expressing his frustration, remarked,

> When we asked the CTUs, Sachdeva [AITUC], Rana [HMS], Suresh Gaur [HMSI] what happened and why this happened, they did not give us a convincing answer. All that they said that a compromise had been reached and all the contract workers and some suspended workers would be taken back. (Ramniwas, July 28, 2014)

It was during the B shift that the management announced that Sonu Gujjar and Shiv Kumar had resigned from the plant along with other 28 workers who were under suspension and that this was a part of the settlement which these 30 workers had agreed to. Workers were infuriated with this announcement. A sense of betrayal and loss prevailed in the plant. With the resignation of these 30 workers, a militant leadership had left the plant. On the day of the announcement of the news of their resignation, hundreds of provincial police and Rapid Action Force (RAF) were deployed inside the plant by late afternoon. This was clearly done to pre-empt any attempt by workers to stage a sit-in inside the plant or harm any parts of the plant including machineries out of anger and agitation. Workers took several days to recover

from this betrayal and regroup for future challenges. The supervisors kept an eye on the workers to prevent any backlash from them.

Newspapers highlighted the report of the union having been bought and the reported payout ranged between Rupees 4 million to 10 million. A message was communicated to the workers that the union took the money, sold out the workers, and left the company. Sonu Gujjar disagreed with this charge and in an interview given more than six years after the settlement said that the main demands of the union had been met. All the contract workers were taken back and the suspension of 14 workers was revoked. “Where was the betrayal in this settlement?” he asked. He further said that they took the money as they were not sure of the outcome of the enquiry the management was going to conduct. He said that all 30 workers received 16 lakh each, including basic salary, provident fund and dearness allowance which they would have got had they worked for the company until they turned 52. During the negotiation, the company agreed to allow the formation of the union (Kaushal and Mukherjee, 2017). Gujjar also complained that the CTUs pledged support but never came openly when it mattered (Raote, 2017). Although the CTUs were not a party to the talks, they did not protest against the settlement either. The CTUs dismissed the allegations that they were complicit in this betrayal and argued that a compromise had to be reached to end the impasse. D. L. Sachdeva said,

> We got what we wanted, didn’t we? Contract workers were taken back and suspension of many workers were revoked. Those 30 workers [were] given money and they left the company but where is the question of betrayal by us arises? (D.L. Sachdev, August 19, 2014)

HMS members asked Suzuki Powertrain workers to accept the management’s decision and did not protest against the termination of the union president Subeh Singh who stood with the

Maruti workers during the strikes and the lockout. Similarly, the Suzuki Bike union was asked not to support the Maruti workers.

In November first week the management declared that the formation of Workers' Committee had been suspended and that workers have to work with MUKU. This announcement did not go down well with the workers. The assault on workers' psychology and confidence continued in the wake of the settlement. Speaking of the harassment by the supervisors, Jagveer said: "The management started harassing us by saying '*humne workers ke daant ke andaar se ungli nikal ke dekh liya, yeh kuch nahin kar sakte, Yeh kaat nahin sakte. Yeh napunsak hain'* [we have seen that the workers can't do anything, they are impotents]." The abusive behaviour by supervisors returned to the shop floor and so did protest by the workers against such behaviour. Commenting on the prevailing situation among workers, Ram Singh, a permanent worker said:

> We went inside [but] what happened was wrong [the forced resignation of the union led by Sonu Gujjar and Shiv kumar]. The situation got worse. The work pressure on us increased. We again decided that we will have to fight for a union, otherwise we would be destroyed. We used to have our meetings inside the plant. We had seen everything. Victory, betrayal, everything, occupied the factory, saw the police but our unity was intact, signed the Undertaking, but occupied the factory again. We were feeling confident, our *chetna* (consciousness) had become different. (Ram Singh, October 13, 2015)

Recovering from the setback of losing the top leadership, the workers regrouped and selected a new union executive of eleven members to file a new union application. The union was led by Ram Meher as president and Sarabjit Singh as general secretary. As the communication and trust between the CTUs and the workers had broken down after the settlement, the new

union decided to not seek support from any CTUs. Relying on the strength of Manesar plant workers, the new leadership filed a new union application with the labour department. Although the old leadership had left the plant and the new leadership had just come with, the management was also scared of any possible backlash from workers. In the words of Rajpal who was a coordinator in the weld shop, and a leading member of the movement:

> Sometimes we would take peanuts with us to the company in a towel. Supervisors were scared of us that something might happen if they say something to workers or abuse them. If the department heads see four-five workers talking during the break, they would come to us immediately, with all smiles and ask us about our well being. We would laugh after he had left. They were scared of us as much as were scared of them. (Rajpal, August 5, 2014)

In the face of growing assertion by the workers on the shop-floor, the management hinted at reconciliation while maintaining that the workers had been "misguided" by "outsiders." In the words of S. Y. Siddiqui, former Managing Executive Officer at MSIL, the conflict in the Manesar plant occurred because the workers were "young and in wrong hands." He further said that the workers were "just kids with zero experience of industry and zero maturity" (Prayag and Kamath, 2012). Following the filing of the application for a new union, the workers had a meeting with the management in which they were told that the union application would not be opposed again and the new union would be accepted by the management. The management adopted a more conciliatory approach to the union formation efforts. Ajmer, who went on lead in the union few years down the line, explained the reason:

> I think [that] they did not want another strike, and the workers were preparing for a strike if the new union application was also rejected. They might also have thought

> that an un-affiliated union (unaffiliated with any central trade union) would be more favourable to them. (Ajmer, September 17, 2015)

There was one more plausible reason why the management did not oppose the formation of a union. When asked why the management changed its stand from vociferous opposition to a conciliatory approach, Pradeep Kumar, a union member in the Manesar plant, said,

> They might have thought that since the old leadership was gone, we won't create much trouble for them. In fact, they told us once, 'we can handle you easily, the old members did not listen to us at all. They had to go.' They didn't realise that we had several layers of leadership; we were not the same worker we were before the first strike. (Pradeep Kumar, November 22, 2015)

The workers, however, learned from their experience of defeat and decided not to delegate all power of decision making to the union; they had to consult workers in a General Body Meeting (GBM) before taking any decision. This decision by workers came on the heels of rumours that the new union body would also be bought out just like the old one. To counter such motives and propaganda, Pradeep said, workers resorted to the following strategy:

> We used to have weekly meeting in all departments. We thought of showing them our majority [read solidarity]. The coordinators would talk to the workers, both permanent and contract workers, everyday and update them about what is happening. Earlier, once the union body decided something, we would just communicate the decision to workers. But now after the betrayal, we decided not to entrust everything to the union. The management didn't like it. They thought we would disintegrate after the settlement [in October], but we became even stronger. The union members were just there to represent us, they were not leaders anymore as all of us had become leaders. (Pradeep Kumar, November 22, 2015)

The union changed its name from Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) to Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU). The union got a registration number from the labour department on February 29, 2012, and the MSIL management recognised the union immediately. The workers hoisted a red flag [69] to mark the Union Day on March 1 despite pressure from the management to go either for a blue or yellow coloured flag. The workers insisted that the red colour displayed all the struggle that went into forming the union. Expressing the feeling of elation, Khusiram said:

> We were so happy when we got our number and hoisted our flag.…We didn't want to think about anything; we drank, and hugged each other and our new union body gave speeches. We thought we can do anything right now. We had become very confident in our unity; workers' unity can defeat anything, any power in the world. That is what we felt on *Jhanda diwas* [flag hoisting day]. (Khusiram, August18, 2014)

Through their struggle, workers developed their consciousness. Khusiram explained: "We had seen so many things: how trade unions [CTUs] work, how the labour department is a slave of the Maruti management. Our government [Haryana government] openly took the side of the management."

A struggle that began in June, 2011 with the first sit-in occupation came to an end after the registration of the union in 2012. The strikes in October took a more general form with workers from several factories joining the Maruti workers spontaneously. The fear of more strikes was real. The Chairman of auto parts manufacturing company, Sona Koyo said that the strike has put the auto industry in a "danger zone" and if not resolved quickly could spread to other plants in short period (India CSR, 2011). The labour struggle did what it was

[69] The use of red flags is common in workers' protests, strikes and demonstrations both in the industrial landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar and at all-India level. This reflects the influence of Left politics and Left-party based unions on workers. Left parties and unions have also influenced the slogans that workers use during strikes or in any other form of conflict with the management.

supposed to do: inflict an economic cost on the enterprises. The 14-day strike cost the company over Rs.7,000 million (Outlook India, October 21, 2011). The two strikes and the lockout caused excise revenue loss for the government to the tune of Rs. 3,500 million, while the MSIL's loss was overs Rs.15,000 million. Total production loss due to the protracted conflict stood at 51,375 units (NDTV, November 26, 2011).

The relevance of the central-level unions diminished as far as mobilising support for the embattled Maruti workers was concerned. The spontaneous solidarity-the solidarity that was developed without formal support of a union- gave expression to the exploited and material lives of workers in Manesar. What was lost on the central unions was the radical potential of the October strikes, workers' willingness to go beyond their respective plants, and to scale up the struggle. This phase also marked the emergence of a new leadership which was held accountable to the rank-and-file. With the new union began a new phase of assertion by workers and continuation of a rare unity and solidarity between permanent and contract workers, not a common picture in the region.

5.7 Conclusion

The strikes in Maruti's Gurgaon plant, Honda's Manesar plant, and Rico's Gurgaon plant provided a backdrop in which Maruti workers at the Manesar plant began to think about forming a union. The unsuccessful strike at the Gurgaon plant did not deter workers as they were more influenced by the successful strikes at Honda and Rico plants. More specifically, the Honda strikes played a major role in shaping workers' consciousness. The nature of this 'demonstration effect'- class struggle at one place can influencing struggles elsewhere - is uneven as place-based specificities play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of these struggles (Wills, 1996). It also shows that workers' consciousness has an element of spatiality: consciousness in one place (Manesar plant) is shaped by events elsewhere. The

Manesar plant became a space of contested terrain. The strikes were followed by creation of bonds of solidary within a plant and across plants in close spatial proximity, a solidarity that was based on overcoming of hierarchy between different categories of workers defined on the basis of their employment or differences based on caste and regional identities. The struggle for an elementary democratic right – the right to form a union by workers – revealed the contradictions of capitalism in multiple forms. What appeared as a simple legal process (the application to form a union) at the beginning spiralled into wildcat strikes, expression of spontaneous solidarity, breaking barriers among workers, and state intervention in support of capital.

The class struggle in the Maruti's Manesar plant had four distinct moments. First, the sit-in strike represented an element of autonomy when the workers defied the unions (e.g., HMSIEU and AITUC) and continued with their strike. Second, the refusal to the company-imposed mandate of good conduct (the GCU – the Good Conduct Undertaking) marked a further assertion of workers' self-activity. The third moment witnessed solidarity between permanent and contract workers and breaking down of spatial barriers when the strike spread to other plants. The fourth moment saw the emergence of a new leadership after the old union was forced to resign.

The first sit-in strike was an 'epistemological break' in workers' consciousness when they lost their political innocence and became aware of several antagonisms that existed between workers on the one hand and state and capital on the other. The strike revealed the class character of the state when the Haryana government declared the strike illegal and police were called in. A belief in the benevolent nature of the MSIL Chairman was shattered when he refused to accept a second union in the company. The strike not only revealed for workers who the class enemies were, but also created a solidarity between different categories of workers and brought them out of their alienated existence. This phase also

marked a growing distrust of big unions (CTUs and HMSIEU). The strike began with a demand for a union but ended with a compromise when the most important demand of workers was the revocation of suspension of the union members. The permanent workers provided the vanguard of the strike. The lockout in August-September forced workers to go beyond what David Harvey (1996) has termed as 'militant particularism.' The Maruti workers' struggle did not remain confined to the plant. The mobilisation outside the plant helped create new bonds of solidarity with other plants in IMT Manesar. Moreover, the Maruti strikes encouraged workers in other plants in Manesar to mobilise, and demand better working conditions and wage increase. Also, strikes in the Maruti plant helped workers in the Suzuki Powerplant and Suzuki Bike to form unions during this period of intensification of class conflict in the auto landscape. Workers from other plants initiated solidarity strikes in support of the Maruti workers. There was a lot of vacillation among workers with regard to the all-India centra trade unions. While after the first strike the workers did not trust one of them (AITUC), during the lockout they gradually moved towards another all-Indian trade union (HMS) and declared to affiliate with it if the union was recognised. However, this bonhomie with HMS did not last long after the second strike began on the issue of contract workers. Despite the advice of HMS and the TUC (a council of many unions), the workers had another sit-in strike. This 14-day strike gave expression to workers' discontent and anger in the region. The solidarity strikes went beyond the Manesar plant and took a more expansive spatial form when thousands of workers in Manesar town joined Maruti workers' struggle spontaneously. In addition, solidarity between Maruti's permanent and contract workers as well as between Maruti and non-Maruti workers was the most significant achievement of the second strike. Following the strike, the old union was forced to resign by the management and a new leadership took over. This leadership distanced itself from the

central unions and formed an independent union which was also recognised by the management.

Commentators have looked at different moments of this protracted class as singular events and termed them as syndicalist and autonomous (For instance, Ness, 2016; Monaco, 2015). An editorial in the workers' newspaper FMS read: "The strikes in the Manesar plant is a de-occupation of the factory and a revolt against trade unions. The strikes showed that workers don't need organisations; all they need is a belief in self-activity" (FMS, January 2012). This position recognises only a partial element of the class struggle at the Manesar plant. While workers asserted their autonomy through collective actions which took a form which is other than the form normally taken by a trade union struggle, they also accepted trade union ideology defined by legalism and compromise. This was seen when the workers wanted to affiliate with one all-India union (HMS) even as they distanced themselves from another (AITUC).

The state and its institutions played a crucial role in shaping workers' consciousness. During the first sit-in strike, the workers experienced the biased role of the state government in favour of the Maruti management; the state intervention in favour of the management continued throughout the strike. Workers did not consider this intervention legitimate and defied the state through continued strikes. Nonetheless, workers also appealed to the elected representatives from Haryana to resolve the crisis and fulfill their demands.

In *What is to be Done?*, Lenin remarked that the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology. However, what is subject to this domination is not the working class as such, but the spontaneous unfolding of the movement (Shandro, 1995, p. 284). Although the Maruti strikes were militant in nature, they could not go beyond trade union consciousness and believed that a union itself could

ensure a better working and living conditions. The unfolding of the struggle could not achieve any radical potential because workers' consciousness was limited by existing trade union ideology (that a union could solve workers' problems) and state intervention. More fundamentally, the disjuncture between workers' thought (consciousness) and actions (militant strikes) can be explained by workers' lack of theoretical consciousness which stands in opposition to their practical activity (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333). This contradiction between thought and action defined the dialectic of consciousness and strike action by the Maruti workers in India's auto-region.

Chapter 6

Restructuring, Resistance and Transformations in Consciousness

6.1 Introduction

The two strikes, the lockout and the formation of a union in the Manesar plant, gave rise to two levels of leadership emerging from the ranks of common workers. The first leadership led the struggles throughout the strikes and lockout, but was eventually forced to resign by the management in order to create divisions and break the solidarity among the workers. This management strategy, however, could not stop the emergence of a new leadership, which took the struggle forward and ultimately formed a union. The plant became a politically contested space with a newly formed union coming out of a protracted class struggle and a defensive management. The strikes had transformed workers' class consciousness from spontaneity to a radical trade union consciousness informed by an awareness of the role of the state and reformist and compromising CTUs. This consciousness underwent further transformations in the backdrop a violent incident which was used by the management to restructure the balance of forces in the plant and on the shop floor. In addition, the state used this incident to limit the spread of the impact of the Maruti strikes in Manesar and the wider automobile landscape in the Gurgaon-Manesar region. This chapter highlights the changes in workers' consciousness after a union was formed, and the class struggle that took shape outside of the factory gates in Maruti's Manesar plant. Furthermore, a direct confrontation with the state and its impact on workers' consciousness is examined in this chapter.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section narrates the management's strategy of resistance to workers' solidarity and assertiveness on the shop floor and how it used a violent incident to put a militant movement on the defensive. This section also

examines the open class bias of the state in favour of capital and against the workers. This discussion is followed by an elaboration of the resistance organised by a new leadership which made use of space a key element to fight a class struggle against the management and the state which emerged as a key player in this struggle. The third section examines the strategies adopted by the management to restructure the relation with workers in the plant and its impact on workers' politics and consciousness. The last section summarises the narratives offered in the previous three sections and offers some empirical generalisations on class consciousness of the Maruti workers and its contradictions mediated by the management, the state, and their own plant-based union.

6.2 Violence, Class Struggle and the State

Following the formation of a union in the Manesar plant, the workers sought to assert some control over working conditions. The union protested against the abusive behaviour of the supervisors on the shop floor and took up workers' grievances with the management. Accepting the long-pending demand of the workers to reduce work intensity, the management introduced a reliever system on the shop floor: if a worker fell sick on the assembly line or workstation, another worker took the place of the sick worker. Workers were not penalized or verbally abused for taking emergency leave. Despite these minor conciliatory steps taken by the management, hostility towards the union persisted. The union prepared a Charter of Demand (CoD) in April 2012, after internal consultations with both the permanent and contract workers, and external consultation with other plant-based unions in IMT Manesar including the three Suzuki unions (Suzuki Motorcycles, Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Castings), HMSIEU, and the Rico union. MSWU also consulted the smaller labour

organisations like the IMK, but distanced itself from the all-India unions or CTUs. [70] The April Charter contained the following major demands:

- Contract workers who have spent two years or more in the plant should be made permanent on a priority basis, and until then, the principle of 'equal pay for equal work' should be applied.
- The salary of the permanent workers should be increased from Rs. 18,000-20,000 to Rs.80,000-10,0000 over a period of next three years. In addition, salary should be delinked from the attendance system. [71]
- Reduction in the training period from three years to one year.
- Relievers should be provided for every workstation, including workstations where contract workers and apprentices are deployed.
- Extension of lunch time from 30 minutes to 60 minutes, and tea break from 7.5 minutes to 10 minutes.
- Reduction in work intensity: one unit be made not in 45-48 seconds but 60 seconds or more.
- Delays up to ten minutes in punching card at the entry gates should not result in deduction of salary.
- The rules on leave should apply equally to all workers; if a worker falls sick, he should be given leave with no pay cut, and it should not be left to the discretion of the supervisor.

[70] The Manesar plant workers blamed the CTUs for not opposing the settlement, which was forced on workers in October, and because of which the old union leadership left the company.

[71] A large part of workers' salary was linked to an arbitrary attendance system. Workers' salary consisted of a variable and fixed element. The variable element was called Production Performance Rewards Scheme (PPRS) and it constituted about 50 per cent of the salary and was linked to workers' leave record. Paid leave did not exist and unplanned leave attracted huge salary cuts. If a worker took one day's leave, Rs.1500 was deducted from his salary; four days' leave meant a deduction of Rs. 6000. If a permanent workers' salary was Rs.15,000, taking a leave of four days meant deduction of close 40 per cent. In the case of contract workers and apprentices, such a deduction meant a negligible salary at the end of the month. What was more reprehensible was a deduction of double the amount (Rs.3000 per day) if the leave was unplanned.

- Bus facilities should be given to all workers and not just permanent workers.
- Housing for all categories of workers, and if this was not possible, facilitating loans on cheaper interest rates.
- Provide educational allowance of Rs. 8,000 for workers' children.

The Charter reflected workers' demands as it had evolved after the union formation process got underway. The intensity of work, policy on leave, parity between permanent and contract workers, higher wages, transport facilities for all were the demands that emerged during the strikes and the lockout in 2011. The new demands included housing for all, educational allowance, and flexibility in reporting time. The Charter was both economic and political, and made no distinction between different categories of workers, including the apprentices. The demand of 'equal pay for equal work' and making contract workers permanent were the most contentious demands made by the union. When asked how contract workers could be made permanent in one plant when they are employed widely across the industry, Mahavir, a terminated permanent worker and former member of the PWC, said, "We thought we would make a beginning here. If contractualisation ended in MSIL, other plants would also be forced to end this system. We thought we could make a new beginning in IMT Manesar."

The management brushed aside the Demand Charter for bringing up 'trivial' issues of contract workers and blamed the 'inexperience' of the union in negotiating a settlement. Although the management was willing to discuss issues of work intensity, more benefits for workers, and higher wages for permanent workers, the demand for parity between permanent and contract workers was declared non-negotiable. Refusing to make any changes in the Charter, the union communicated to the management that no negotiation was possible without accepting the demands on contract workers. Two factors determined the union's position on contract workers: a consensus among permanent workers and pressure from contract workers on the union; and the experience of solidarity shown during the strikes and

the lockout in 2011. The union's stand on contract workers defied the existing trend in collective bargaining in the auto industry where the contract workers usually got a raw deal in the Demand Charters and in the final settlements which was witnessed in HMSI, Rico Industries, and the three Suzuki plants. The Charters in these plants seldom represented the demands of contract workers and, if they did at all, it remained perfunctory. This occurred despite contract workers taking part in union formation struggles in these plants.

The union called for tool-town strike to pressurize the management to return to the negotiating table. In response, a meeting took place in May first week, which ended in a deadlock. A follow-up meeting was scheduled on June 7, which was cancelled by the management two days prior to the meeting. An obvious strategy was in play: the management wanted to delay the negotiations and to force the union to drop the contentious issue of contract workers. No progress was made till June last week and delayed negotiations led to the spread of rumours; workers grew suspicious of the union because of their experience when the first union was bought out and forced to resign. Sanjiv, a permanent worker expressed his apprehension: "We thought this union had also been bought out, and that is why they are not talking about the settlement. They [the union] are not doing anything even as the management is delaying talks." The union clarified its position on the negotiations in a GBM and assured workers of a strike action if the management continued dragging its feet on the demands.

When the negotiations did not move forward, MSWU held discussions with other unions in the region. MSWU rejected the advice of these unions to drop the demand of the contract workers. Also, MSWU had not affiliated with any CTU and remained independent. This independence along with the experience of a protracted class struggle helped it retain its autonomy. It was commonplace in the auto industry that if a deadlock was reached during a settlement, several compromises were made: militant workers were asked to resign; if there

was a solidarity between permanent and contract workers, the union was forced not to press for contract workers' demands. Many of these compromises were also made by the plant-based unions, but in several other cases, the central unions negotiated the compromise for their constituent unions. [72] In the context of Maruti workers, AITUC official D.L Sachdev said, "Compromise is the key to trade union politics. Maruti alone cannot abolish contract workers system and make all of them permanent. Workers have to be practical and reasonable." By not dropping the demands of contract workers, the union did not confirm to the established practices of trade unionism in the region. Expressing discontent with the advice of unions, Khusriram said:

> Every union [CTUs, the plant-based unions)] told us that we should not think too much about the contract workers, and instead focus on our own demands. They told us to be practical and patient and treat the demand of permanent and contract workers separately. We kind of knew about these unions and particularly the CTUs, but their true character came out when all they talked about was compromise. We decided we would listen to everybody, but will do what is in the interest of our workers. (Khusiram, August 18, 2014)

Despite the pressure from the management and advice by the unions, the fight for contract workers represented a solidarity which was both moral and political. It was moral because of the memory of the strikes in which both categories of workers fought together. "We fought for the union together" was the common refrain. The solidarity was also political. Having gone through a protracted struggle in 2011, the union and the permanent workers had already realised that the success of a strike action depended on the support of contract workers.

[72] The CTUs made no bones about this politics of compromise. During interviews with the author, several leaders agreed that compromise of this kind has been the practice in the region because this was the most practical thing to do in the given circumstances when contract workers do not find places in the laws the laws on union formation or settlements. Hensman (2011) makes a similar point in the context of unionism in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) when the CTUs took a more compromising stand compared to plant-based unions on contentious issues.

The smaller radical labour organisations like IMK and KNS supported MSWU, and advised to take contract workers along in any negotiation with the management. They underscored the fact that the unity between permanent and contract workers was the key to their success (during strikes and ultimate formation of the union), and they must not abandon the contract workers. During this phase, when negotiations reached a deadlock, the relation between these groups and Manesar workers grew stronger. Shyamveer, from IMK, reflecting on the situation, said, "Earlier they [the Manesar workers] ignored us [and our advice], but after they saw the real face of the unions closely [during the strikes in 2011], they started believing us and patiently listened to what we said." Ramniwas, a leading worker in the movement, concurred,

> These organisations gave us moral strength. They were the only ones in this area [industrial region of Manesar and Gurgaon] who told us not to leave the contract workers. It boosted our morale; we thought we were doing the right thing. (Ramniwas, July 28, 2014)

The union frequently consulted with activists from these groups to strategize their activities inside the plant. The rank-and-file held weekly meetings with the union to get updates on the talks. In order to put pressure on the union, the management issued show-cause notices to militant workers for creating deliberate faults in the assembly line. The union president Ram Meher was suspended on the grounds of "causing harm to the company." Two more union members were suspended on grounds of "inciting workers against the company" and misbehaving with management staff on inspection duty. The suspensions were subsequently revoked when workers threatened to go on a strike. The union retaliated by asking workers not to report faults found in the cars. No new dates were announced for the next meeting, and anger among workers was exploding. The union considered resigning if the demands were not met.

The abusive behaviour by supervisors, which had declined after the union was formed, returned to the shop floor. Altercations broke out between supervisors and workers frequently and this became a recurrent feature after early July. On July 16, an altercation broke out between a worker and a supervisor during tea break in A shift. Sangram Kishore Majhi, a supervisor, accused a permanent worker Jiya Lal for deliberately creating faults in assembly line. Jiya Lal refused to talk about it during the tea break. The supervisor used casteist slurs like *chamar* (a low caste in India) against him, and Jiya Lal slapped the supervisor. Jiya Lal was immediately suspended, and the supervisor was sent on leave. The union demanded revocation of the suspension, but the management refused and lodged a police complaint against Jiya Lal. The stalemate continued over suspension of Jiya Lal and lack of progress in the Demand Charter. On July 18, workers decided to go on a strike, if the suspension was not revoked. Once the B Shift workers came in, the union informed the workers that Jiya Lal had been suspended, and no new date had been announced for negotiations. This news infuriated the workers. Meanwhile, according to workers, they heard glasses breaking and over 100 people in company uniforms, whom the workers did not recognize, started attacking workers. The workers started defending themselves with whatever instruments they could lay their hands on to defend against what they termed as company bouncers.[73] During the commotion, hundreds of cars were broken and the offices of management officials were ransacked. This chaotic situation prevailed inside the plant for three four hours. In the late evening when fire broke out in one section of the plant, the workers started leaving the factory premises. News channels reported on the same night that workers had set the Manesar plant on fire and destroyed property including cars and machinery. It was also reported that a general manager, HR, Awanish Dev was killed by workers (NDTV, July 19, 2012). The management alleged that workers attacked the

[73] It is commonplace for companies to deploy private security personnel, known as bouncers in the local parlance, who are not on the payroll of the company but render services during strikes.

management officials with iron rods and door beams, and did not allow the management officials to leave the factory by closing the exit gates. In the scuffle, over 100 management officials and supervisory staff were injured. The workers stated that Awanish Dev had agreed to revoke Jiya Lal's suspension on July 19 and this was corroborated by labour department officials in Gurgaon (Sehgal, 2012). [74] The workers argued they had no reason to attack Awanish Dev, and the management instigated violence through the private security personnel and company security officials.

The incident was preceded by several violent incidents in plants across India. The MD of an Italian firm Graziano Transmission, Greater NOIDA (Uttar Pradesh) was allegedly killed by terminated workers on September 22, 2008. The Vice-President of Coimbatore-based (Tamilnadu) Pricol Ltd.[75] was attacked by a group of terminated workers in September 2009. He died a day later. Similar incidents of violence were reported in Ghaziabad-based (Uttar Pradesh) Allied Nippon in November 2010 and in Regency Ceramics, Yanam (Puducherry) in January 2012 (Madhavan, 2012). This spatial politics of violence was shaped by class struggle (Kelliher, 2021) when management's refusal to negotiate and highhandedness led to violent incidents. The fear of violence engulfing the industrial landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar was palpable among representatives of capital and the state which led to the emergence of a discourse which blamed workers.

An ideological assault on workers by the mainstream media began when the mainstream news channels described the Manesar workers as 'mob', 'Maoists', and 'brutes'. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) ordered the domestic intelligence agency Intelligence

[74] The actual events that unfolded on 18 July is still shrouded in mystery. No impartial investigations have taken place so far regarding what really happened on that fateful day and who was responsible for the death of a senior management official.

[75] In 2015, the sessions court ordered "double life imprisonment" to eight workers allegedly involved in the murder case. However, he Madras High Court overturned the conviction of six workers out of the eight workers accused of murder. The court also commuted life imprisonment sentence of two other workers. The court found insufficient evidence to uphold the verdicts of the lower courts (Manuel, 2017).

Bureau (IB) to probe into possible Maoist link in the plant violence (Joshi, 2012). In a written reply in the parliament on the Maruti violence, the Deputy Minister, Ministry for Home Affairs (MHA), stated that the Naxalites (a term used for Maoists) took advantage of the discontent of workers in the industrial region and caused violence (Bhalla, 2012). A similar sentiment was expressed by the Minister of Industries in Haryana, Randeep Surjewala, who described the incident as a part of a 'concerted design' by some ultra-Left groups to disturb industrial peace in the region (The Hindu, July 21, 2012). While the central unions termed the Maoist link theory as a 'bogus theory', they demanded that the guilty should be punished. The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) issued a statement that "unruly elements will be emboldened" if swift actions were not taken and such incident would vitiate the industrial climate of the country. It further demanded strong action against the culprits to send out a message to the industrial community (The Hindu, July 31, 2012). The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) said in a press release that the incident "has sent shock waves in the corporate boardrooms of companies" (FICCI, July 21, 2012). The Employers Federation of India (EFI) issued a statement on behalf of industrial organisations such as Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry in India (ASSOCHAM), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE) that "such barbaric acts are not repeated" and the state should take quick action to restore industrial peace in the region (Patel, 2012). Never before had the capitalist class come down so heavily on workers in a plant in the region. The Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) was central to the auto landscape in Gurgaon-Manesar and a struggle here had the potential beyond the confines of the plant. The incident had struck fear in the hearts of capital and the state. While the deceased management official gained sympathy, the emerging discourse on the incident criminalised the workers. Naveen, a former contract worker

expressed his frustration when he said, “everyone thought of us as criminals who killed a man. Our family members also thought like this” (Naveen, July 13, 2015).

The police swung into action after the incident by picking up workers from their homes, dormitories, bus stations, and railway stations. Many workers had left their uniforms on the roads for the fear of being arrested by the police; anyone who used those left-behind uniforms were also arrested. The families of the union members were summoned to report at the Manesar police station, and when they did, they were detained for several hours. They were also threatened with arrests, if they did not provide information on the whereabouts of the union members. Harassment of workers’ family members continued for several weeks. Local police visited the homes of workers frequently and threatened to arrest their brothers and fathers. Within two-three days, over 100 workers were arrested on various charges. The eleven members of the union and Jiya Lal surrendered at the Manesar police station. The arrests continued, and in the next few weeks, 40 more workers were arrested. By the end of August 2012, 148 workers had been arrested on charges of destruction of property and murder. 65 workers more workers were made accused in the case and were declared “proclaimed offenders” (PUDR, 2018, p.10). The workers were lodged in Bhondsi central jail, Gurgaon. In the subsequent months, they accused the police of torture to get a murder confession. Meanwhile, the bail plea of 15 workers was rejected by the sessions court in December, 2012. In May 2013, Justice KC Puri of Punjab and Haryana High Court rejected the bail plea of Maruti workers and observed, “The incident is most unfortunate occurrence which has lowered the reputation of India in the estimation of the world. Foreign investors are not likely to invest the money in India out of fear of labour unrest” (Yadav, 2015).

The central unions were on the defensive as they did not want to attract any hostile response from either the provincial government or central government. The plant-based unions in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon and the Trade Union Council (TUC) turned their back

on the Maruti workers owing to state coercion and media blitzkrieg which demonised and criminalised the workers. The confidence that workers had gathered after the strikes in 2011 and subsequent union formation withered away. This marked the end of a phase of workers' militancy that had started in June 2011. No protest was allowed by the administration, even unrelated to MSIL. The clampdown on Maruti workers put the unions in IMT Manesar on the defensive. The CTUs and plant-based unions made sure that no worker grievances turned into any violent act or anything close to that, and workers engaged in self-policing. The TUC even passed a resolution which stated that in plants where settlements were due, the unions should be reasonable in their demands and keep a control over workers, including the contract workers.[76] Speaking of the prevailing state coercion and its impact on workers in Manesar, a permanent worker in Munjal Showa[77] said,

> Everyone was scared in IMT [Manesar]. Our settlement was due in a few months, but we were so scared that we didn't want to enrage the management for any reason. What happened in Maruti could have happened with us. We even stopped shouting slogans for a few months. (Chandra Sekhar, December 13, 2015)

The Maruti workers expressed the anger, frustration and desperation in the following words:[78]

> We had become brutes in the eyes of *samaj* [larger society and near extended family]. We were looked at with hatred by our own people, forget about outsiders. (Ramniwas, July 28, 2014)

[76] Interviews with IMK activist Shyamveer, Provisional Working Committee (PWC) member Ram Niwas, and President of the Rico union, Dharuhera and a prominent TUC member Raj Kumar corroborated this information.
[77] The union and workers at Munjal Showa had supported the strikes in the Manesar plant in 2011 by taking part in rallies and joining gate meetings.
[78] This conversation took place in the Gurgaon Sessions Court's premises in September 2015. The workers were on trial were produced before the sessions judge for bail application which was subsequently denied. These workers did not reveal their names.

> Why would we kill a manager? Yes, we were angry with the way they were treating us. We were not human beings in that plant. They were treating us like dogs, like animals; now suddenly we become criminals. (Sonu Kumar, July 28, 2014)

> Our own family members started telling us that because we could not do our work properly, we did something like this. The trade unions [CTUs and the TUC members] are real cowards. On the day of the event, we called them, but their phones were switched off. They betrayed us. They did not support us when police harassed our families. (Gaurav, July 28, 2014)

The sentiments are an expression of anger, desperation, and alienation prevalent among workers in the aftermath of the violent incident. The alienation was not only from trade unions, but also from familial and social ties.

The district administration took measures to prevent potential workers' unrest in Gurgaon and Manesar. Any meeting of workers was prohibited in the region. Section 144[79] was put in place in Manesar. The plant was shut down for a month. More than 500 permanent workers, 1800 contract workers, casual workers, apprentices and trainees were terminated for "perpetuating and participating in the violence." The plant resembled a militarised zone when it opened after over a month of the lockout. Over 300 workers were escorted inside the plant by armed guards. More than 2000 security personnel were deployed at the plant, including provincial police force, anti-riot Rapid Action Force (RAF) and the company's own security team led by former army officials. The RAF was also deployed inside the plant to ensure security during both shifts and provide security to management officials. The company reported an estimated loss of Rs.1,400 crore because of the lockout (Dutta, 2012). The terminated workers waged a struggle for the jailed workers and against their own illegal

[79] Section 144 of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) empowers the magistrate of any state or union territory in India to pass an order prohibiting the gathering of four or more people in a specified area.

termination. The ID Act, 1947 clearly stipulated that a firm must take permission of the state to terminate workers if there are more than 100 workers.[80] MSIL violated this provision but the state neither penalised nor intervened against this illegal act.

The violence committed directly by workers and the violence perpetuated by capitalism should not be seen as separate elements, nor should they be fetishized (Tyner and Inwood, 2014). The structural violence carried out by the Maruti management, such as offering low wages, providing insecure employment, enforcing high work intensity, and delaying a settlement, cannot be separated from the violent incident that took place within the plant. These two forms of violence are mutually constituted. In his analysis of the picket violence in England, Kelliher (2021) contends that state violence extended beyond mere police action against workers on the picket lines. It also encompassed directives issued by Home Secretaries, the judicial interpretation of picket laws, and the lobbying efforts of employers' organisations (p.3). A similar pattern emerged following the violence at the Manesar plant, where the state, Maruti management, and the mainstream (liberal) media constructed a narrative depicting the workers as "violent" and "brutes."

6.3 Class struggle and the Questions of Justice

E. P. Thompson in his book *The Poverty of Theory* had remarked that “every class struggle is at the same time a struggle over values” (Thompson, 1995, p. 231). The question of justice aligned with class struggle as the Maruti workers demanded *Nyay* (justice) against the management as well as the state. Justice for the imprisoned workers became a rallying cry for the Maruti workers. Justice was seen as upholding the ethical principles of rule of law and punishing the guilty instead of victimising the workers. Moreover, it involved following a legal path to fight against injustice meted out to the workers. The relation of justice with class

[80] The recent changes in labour laws have increased this threshold to 300 workers.

struggle of the Maruti workers was contentious. Initially it became a part of class struggle (restoring trade union rights, taking back the retrenched workers, and withdrawal of police and judicial action against the imprisoned workers). However, as the movement progressed, justice became the predominant concern of the workers in place of being a part of larger class struggle.

The Maruti movement explicitly engaged in class struggle against the state. The management on the other hand used the violent incident to recalibrate its strategy, and pushed back a demoralised and coerced workforce which had become assertive both during the struggle and after the formation of a union. The class struggle of the Maruti workers took a new form after the July violence when they began to fight against dismissals, imprisonment and criminalisation of the workforce. The desire to prove their innocence to the society became stronger while the struggle moved beyond the factory gates of the Manesar plant. After the July 18 incident, the political representatives from villages in IMT Manesar pledged their support to MSIL to guard against "anti-Maruti" activities. The villagers convened a *Mahapanchayat* (grand assembly) and reiterated their support to MSIL, and urged it to stay in Manesar in response to a rumour that the plant would be moved to Hanspalpur in Gujarat, which is considered a labour-unrest free state by corporations (Ajay, 2012). A *sarpanch* (village council head) from Kasan, describing the pressure from the management, said:

> they [the management] told us that we have to report them if we see any Maruti worker in our villages. These people [the workers] killed a manager. They deserve punishment and we did everything to make sure that Maruti does not leave Manesar. (Rajendra Singh, November 11, 2015)

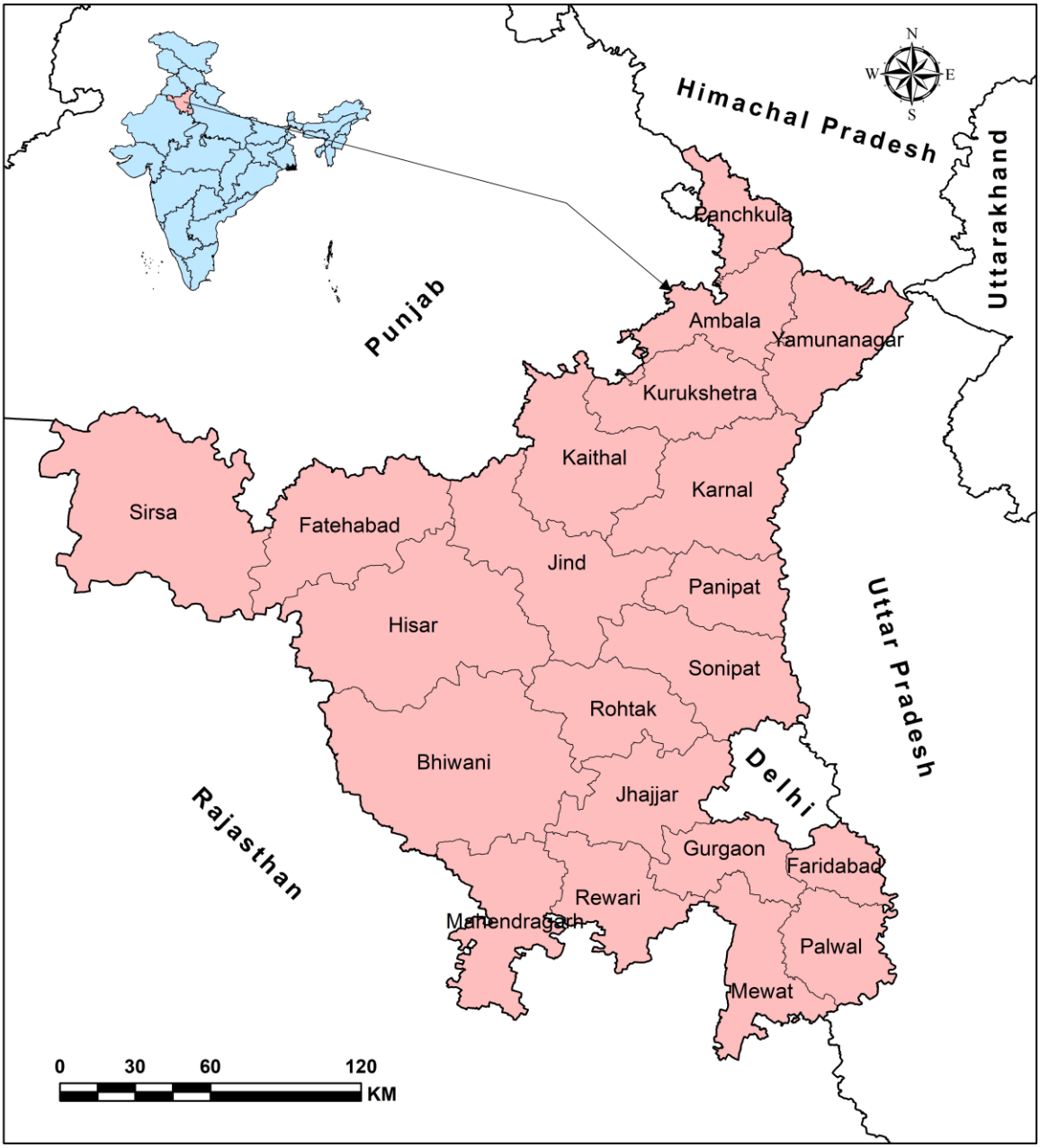
148 workers, including the union members had been put in prison. The police oppression continued, and family members of the workers were harassed. The First Information Report

(FIR) filed by the Manesar police used a term “unknown workers” in the plant engaged in violent activities. This gave the police power to arrest workers who were not even present in the plant on July 18. The central unions such as AITUC and HMS demanded an enquiry into the violent incident but did not take any initiative to organise workers in the region to fight against mass dismissals and state coercion. The smaller organisations like IMK, Bigul Mazdoor and KNS continued to support the workers and discussed ways to organise a counter state propaganda and to launch a legal battle. They also discussed plans to start a movement against the MSIL and the state government. The initiative to fightback, however, came from the workers themselves. They had switched off their phones for fear of being tracked by the police, but contacted with other workers through informal networks. With support from smaller labour organisations, the retrenched workers launched the next phase of the movement. The permanent workers regrouped and formed a seven-member Provisional Working Committee (PWC), MSWU, comprising of workers from different districts in Haryana (See **Map 6.1**). The committee was given the responsibility of organising workers who had scattered due to police oppression and fear of imprisonment. The movement defined two tasks for itself: release of the jailed workers and a fair enquiry into the violent incident; and taking back the terminated workers.

The terminated permanent workers led the struggle with support from the contract workers. The state propaganda and the media had already criminalised the Maruti workers. Gurgaon and Manesar were out of reach for these workers because of the massive police deployment. The plant-based unions who had supported the Maruti workers in the past did not come out in solidarity because of the fear of state repression. In addition, the management in these plants had categorically warned the workers and their unions that any solidarity activity, let alone strike, would lead to immediate termination and registration of criminal cases. In the absence of support from CTUS and company-based unions, the Maruti workers

sought support from the villages in Haryana. Also, workers felt the need to prove to their family members and *samaj* (larger community) about their innocence regarding the incident of July 18.

Map 6.1: District Map of Haryana



Speaking of the reasons to go to rural Haryana to seek support for their movement, Ramniwas poignantly said:

> What could we have done when we could not go to Manesar due to [section] 144? Police were picking up anyone who had worked in Maruti. Everyone was looking at us with contempt. They would say things like 'you could not work properly...you had a permanent job, why did you do this?' They didn't know what was happening inside the company; they used to think big company means all good things. They did not know why we were fighting for a union. Maruti was a big name. No one was with us. We realised that if people are not with us, we cannot fight. *Hum soch rahe the ki aakhir hum kis se ladhe, company se yah logon se?* [We were thinking who should we fight with-the company or our society?]. (Ramniwas, July 28, 2014)

The PWC began organising the terminated workers. The family members of the jailed workers also took part in this struggle. No meeting of the Maruti workers was allowed in Gurgaon-Manesar for three months after the incident. The first meeting took place in Gurgaon's Kamla Nehru Park in November, 2012 where the workers passed a resolution to meet with the elected representatives such as Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) of their respective constituencies through their family members and members of village councils and *Khap Panchayats*. Most of the workers in the plant were the inhabitants of Haryana, so the issue of 'Haryana Boys' resonated with villagers. After the involvement of the *Khaps*, the question of justice for Maruti workers was supplemented with justice for 'Haryana boys,' referring to workers from Haryana who had been imprisoned.

It was only in early 2013 that the all-India unions expressed support for the embattled Maruti workers by giving minimal financial donations, demanding speedy trial of the jailed

workers and a judicial enquiry into the violent incident. A meeting between the PWC and the CM of Haryana was scheduled in January, 2013 to demand the release of jailed workers and cessation of police harassment of workers' families. Before the meeting could take place, the police arrested Iman Khan, a PWC member. This prompted other members of the PWC to go underground for a month. Emerging from the underground, the PWC called an 'all India day of solidarity action' on February 5, 2013 (Firstpost, Feb 1, 2013). While the *Khap* Panchayats near the MSIL plant supported MSIL, other Khap Panchayats in rural Haryana came out to support the workers. More than one thousand retrenched workers, both permanent and contract, gathered in Kaithal to protest in front of the residence of Haryana's Industries Minister. They were joined by *Khap Panchayat* leaders from nearly 50 villages. CITU, a central trade union federation, which had a considerable presence among government scheme workers and transport unions in Haryana, played a major role in providing logistical support by arranging food, water and accommodation in a scorching summer month.[81] The smaller radical organisations like IMK and KNS took active part in mobilising support for the Maruti workers. During this time *Jan Sangharsh Manch* (Platform for People's struggle, JSM),[82] an organisation active among construction workers and Anganwadi workers[83] in Haryana, joined the struggle and took part in the Kaithal protests. The workers aided by the smaller organisations, CITU and the Khap members, protested in front of the Industry Minister's house on May 19, 2013, in which, by one account, over 5,000 people participated. The police encircled the protest site and brutally assaulted the protesters and arrested hundreds of workers, activists and *Khap Panchayat* leaders. The Kaithal protests did not yield any results,

[81] CITU was an insignificant player among industrial workers in Gurgaon-Manesar, but had a good presence in rural Haryana. The scheme workers are those who work in government's welfare schemes such rural health workers, and the workers involved in the MNREGA projects.

[82] JSM was a breakaway faction of CPI(ML). Apart from organising construction workers, JSM is also active in anti-caste movements in Haryana.

[83] Aanganwadi refers to rural care centres run by the central government to combat hunger and malnutrition among children. The women workers in these care centres are paid not a salary but an honorarium which can be changed at the whim of the central and state governments. Protests by these workers for better wage have become more frequent in the last decade and the protests are led by place-based organisation in different provinces.

although it involved and subsequently mobilised diverse political groups in support of the Maruti workers. Following the police action, *Khap Panchayats* refused to rally in support of the Maruti workers. Describing the sombre mood among *Khap* leaders, Satish, a PWC member, said:

> After the police crackdown in Kaithal, the *Khap* people asked us 'what have you done? Why are the police and the government so much against you [Maruti workers]? We have joined many protests in our lifetime, but never had seen such police action against us.' They stopped coming to our meetings and protests after that incident. (Satish, July 28, 2014)

The Khap Panchayats had always played a powerful role in Haryana politics, but they could not continue to support the embattled Maruti workers due to state repression.

On the first anniversary of the violent incident in 2013, the jailed workers went on a one-day hunger strike inside the Bhondsi central jail. The PWC tried to organise a meeting in IMT Manesar, but the district administration denied permission. Fearing a reprisal from workers, the police kept a close watch on working class neighbourhoods in Manesar and Gurgaon, and imposed Section 144 in IMT Manesar that legally prohibited a gathering of more than four people at one place. The panchayats (village councils) in close proximity to Manesar and Gurgaon aided police surveillance.[84] The MSIl Manesar management warned against any strike or protest inside the plant and participation in events organised by the PWC in Gurgaon. Similar instructions were issued to unions and workers in Suzuki plants such as Suzuki Bike and Powertrain, who had earlier supported and took part in the struggle for union formation in 2011. Suzuki Motorcycles India Employees Union (SMIEU) and Suzuki Powertrain Employees Union (SPEU) were detained in the Manesar police station. Their

[84] The village councils surrounding the industries in Gurgaon and Manesar supported the Maruti management, while the councils in rural Haryana supported the workers.

phones were taken away, and they were not allowed to communicate with anyone for over 24 hours. The PWC organised the meeting in the Leisure Valley Park, Gurgaon, which was far away from plants and working class neighbourhoods. The venue of the meeting was swamped by police, which discouraged the central unions, company-based unions and common workers to take part in the meeting. The fear of arrest lurked in the background with many workers walking around the park but did not attend the meeting. In this thinly-attended meeting the workers resolved to continue the fight for justice for the jailed workers.

Over the next several months, the PWC organised meetings in different parts of Haryana to mobilise support for the jailed workers. Meanwhile, the support for the movement waned among the terminated workers. These workers were without work for more than a year; the fear of the police action did not help either. Many workers gradually moved away from the movement and started looking for work in other sectors and regions. Trade union federations such as AITUC and NTUI began to take part and organise solidarity meetings in Gurgaon in support of the Maruti workers. The HMS, however, had completely distanced itself from the movement and advised its constituent unions in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon to stay away from the PWC-led events. During this phase of the movement, the involvement of civil society groups and smaller workers' organisations increased. Organisations like IMK, KNS, BMD, and JSM started playing a more active role in the movement. The movement, however, could not connect with workers in the region owing to state coercion, spatial shift of the movement to the rural hinterland. Moreover, no union or organisation in Gurgaon-Manesar could mobilise workers to support the movement by taking strike action. Non-bailable arrest warrants were issued against 66 terminated workers (apart from 149 workers who had already been arrested and put in prison) for their alleged involvement in the violent incident. The repression started again as police threatened the PWC and the workers

supporting them not to continue with their agitation. Over 200 workers had been jailed and there was an apprehension of more arrests, including of the PWC members.

In order to galvanise the movement, the PWC organised a *Jan Jagran Yatra* (public awareness campaign) in which the terminated workers, Civil Society Organisation (CSOs), and smaller labour organisations participated. The campaign started from Kaithal[85] on January 15, 2014. The workers marched 300 kms through all the major districts in Haryana such as Jind, Rohtak, Jhajjar, and Gurgaon to reach *Jantar Mantar*[86] on January 31. Company-based unions such as HMSI, MUKU, Subros Employees union, Sunbeam Workers Union among others expressed support to the campaign when it reached Gurgaon. The CTUs took part in the rallies and meetings organised in Gurgaon. Following the culmination of the campaign in Jantar Mantar in Delhi, the PWC submitted a memorandum to the President of India demanding justice for the Maruti workers. When I asked why the campaign marched through the rural Haryana instead of working class neighbourhoods and factories in Delhi NCR, Khusiram from PWC said:

> For us the main motive [behind the march to Delhi] was to tell people that we are not criminals, we are not animals. We decided to take out the march to Delhi and on our way explain people what Maruti company was and how it treated its workers. We told people how we got 7.5 minutes tea breaks and how hard we worked for the company. We told people that the company was prospering at our cost. The name is big but those who worked hard got nothing in return. We also told people that the death of the senior management official was a conspiracy by the management to take revenge on workers for forming a union. (Khusiram, August 18, 2014)

[85] Kaithal was chosen as a starting point as a mark of protest against police brutality on workers in May, 2013.
[86] *Jantar Mantar* is a state-sanctioned popular protest site in Delhi. The site has a symbolic importance because of its spatial proximity to the Parliament. However, the state also uses the site as a container of protest in order to deny protests to spill into the streets in Delhi.

The workers held a candle light march with the deceased manager Awanish Dev's picture at the front of the rally along with posters demanding justice for Manesar workers. During the march, the anti-worker actions of the Maruti management and the state government's collusion with the company was highlighted. While the PWC connected with the CSOs, it remained aloof from the common workers in the region. The meetings organised by the PWC witnessed the presence of unions' representatives, members of the CTUs and activists, but ordinary workers did not attend these protest events. Workers expressed sympathy for the jailed and terminated workers, but the fear of coercion was stronger. A permanent worker in Rico Industries, Gurgaon, said,

> No one was willing to put their life at risk because of the Maruti people. They came to some of us and asked us to participate in their events, but I did not go. It had become a criminal issue now and we feared police action if we participated in their events. (Surendra Choudhury, December 19, 2015)

In addition, the support of terminated contract workers gradually dissipated as they started looking for work in other industrial areas in Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). Some of these workers migrated to auto clusters located in Pune and Chennai Metropolitan Region (CMR). The Justice March reached its culmination at *Jantar Mantar*[87] where civil society leaders and progressive and left-leaning intellectuals attended the event in large numbers. The violent incident and the state repression that followed it put the Maruti workers on the defensive, and the solidarity that they had developed in IMT Manesar with other workers was lost. The retrenched workers regrouped under a new leadership led by the newly formed PWC. Despite the absence of a formal union or structure, the workers fought for the jailed workers and the terminated workers.

[87] Jantar Mantar is a place in Delhi where protests are organised against the government by various social groups.

Several conclusions could be drawn from the developments after the violent incident. First, the self-activity of workers was quite evident in the way they regrouped to fight against their victimisation and criminalisation while at the same time fighting against state coercion. Second, the decision to go to the villages revealed that workers used their identity as members of a place-based community, in this case a village community, to fight for their class interests and identity. The ideological effects of such a move only facilitated and reinforced workers' desire to convince the community of their innocence. Third, the beginning of the movement was characterised by a fight for justice for the jailed workers and taking back the retrenched workers. However, by the end of the Justice March, the only significant issue had become the release of workers. The turn to civil society and human rights discourse became more pronounced in the next several months. The next section will deal with these issues along with the developments inside the Manesar plant.

6.4 Strategy of Capital, Class Struggle and the Consolidation of Trade Union Consciousness

Locked out after the July 18 incident, the Manesar plant opened a month later. The workers resumed work under heavy police presence. Along with the state police, the RAF and IRF were also deployed inside the plant. The management threatened the workers with job loss if they discussed the violent incident or contacted or supported the terminated workers. No informal grouping or leadership was allowed to operate inside the plant. The management unilaterally announced a settlement with workers. The management took several steps to alter the balance of forces inside the plant.

After the plant re-opened, there were only 500 permanent workers and 200 contract workers from the old workforce. As a part of the strategy to divide workers, over 300

permanent workers were transferred from the Gurgaon plant[88] to the Manesar plant. The composition of the workforce was changed deliberately in order to prevail upon the young and aggrieved workers from the Manesar plant. Instead of hiring through contractors, the management decided to hire 1,500 Company Trainees (CTs) directly for six-seven months at a time. Their contracts were renewed after a break of two weeks. The permanent workers who had been working after the plant became operational in 2007 were not allowed to work together. Any work-station was a mix of transferred workers from the Gurgaon plant, CTs and Manesar plant workers. In addition, the management gradually took steps to change the regional composition of workers. Most of the workers in the plant were from Haryana and Rajasthan. The management changed this composition by hiring more migrant workers to break every basis of unity and solidarity among workers. Majority of the CTs were recruited from the ITIs in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Odisha and Bengal among other states.

The permanent workers began talking about a union again, but the management opposed union elections. Instead, a Works Committee was constituted to represent workers' grievances. Majority of the committee members were the transferred workers from the Gurgaon plant and through this committee MUKU, the company-promoted union, increased its influence over the Manesar workers. It advised workers against supporting the terminated workers or the jailed workers even as the PWC-led movement was gathering steam in rural Haryana. Workers were agitated by the management's attempts to bring MUKU through the backdoor. Pawan Kumar, who was the president of the MSWU between 2014-16, remarked:

> The Works Committee and the workers from Gurgaon would always tell us to forget what happened in the past and think of the future, but how could we? We fought against them to have our own union, but the same people were telling us what to do

[88] The workers in the Gurgaon plant were considered more subservient and not likely to make a common cause with the struggles of the Manesar plant workers.

> and what not to do. Whatever facilities we have today is because of those people who are in jail and fighting outside of the plant. Many of us were in touch with them (PWC) secretly and discussed of ways to support the jailed workers. But the Works Committee and the Gurgaon workers divided us [the Manesar workers]. Many workers were influenced by MUKU and started asking why we are supporting the old workers who have already lost their jobs. They said, 'We do not want to lose our jobs as well.' But it was a difficult situation for many of us who fought for our union, fought for our rights. (Pawan Kumar, November 23, 2015)

The demand for union elections could not be postponed for too long. As the momentum for justice for Maruti workers grew outside the plant, the workers inside the plant demanded union elections. The management fearing a growing disquiet among workers over the activities of the Works Committee and the influence of the PWC on workers, declared union elections in April 2014. The elections were held in the first week of April, 2014. The workers were divided by two factions. One faction was supported by the management and MUKU. The other faction opposed MUKU; it consisted mainly of workers who had worked in the plant during the strikes, and wanted its own voice represented by the union. The second faction won the elections. The election provided an opportunity for the Manesar workers to unshackle the fear in which they had been working after the violent incident in July 2012. The new union openly proclaimed support for the jailed and terminated workers.

The union submitted a Charter of Demand in September, 2014. While the old union gave equal importance to the demands of contract workers, the new union did not give any space to the Company Trainees (CTs) or a limited number of contract workers. The permanent workers gradually distanced themselves from the trainees and other non-permanent workers on issues of work intensity, abuse by supervisors, overtime pay, and rules governing leaves. The distance reached its point of culmination in September 2015, when the

settlement did not include any demands of the CTs. When the CTs protested against a meagre rise in wages after the settlement, and did not join work, police and private security personnel attacked the workers and dispersed them. Several workers who were leading this protest were fired. The union neither supported these workers' demands nor stood in solidarity with them. This incidence brought out the disunity among workers and the union followed the conventional trade union politics in the region which worked only for the permanent workers.

The election of a new union, however, boosted the morale of the jailed workers as well as the PWC-led movement. The PWC expected the new union to fight against termination and imprisonment of the Maruti workers. Although the union pledged to support the cause of the jailed and terminated workers, it did not put this pledge into practice. While the PWC-led movement conducted protests and demonstrations in Gurgaon, and in different parts of Haryana on the anniversary of the July 18 incident in 2014, the union did not take any action to support the outside workers. The union only agreed to provide financial assistance to the jailed workers' families. Four terminated workers had died because of illness since July 2012. The union contributed four lakhs to each deceased workers' families. After the euphoria of the election ended, the union decided to only support the criminal-case related expenses. The management warned the new union against 'anti-company' activities by partaking in the protests organised by the PWC. In addition, there was no consensus among the permanent workers on supporting the terminated and jailed workers. While a majority of workers still felt a moral obligation to support the legal battles of the jailed workers, they were not in favour of supporting the demand of taking back the retrenched workers. As a union member who requested anonymity put it:

> We want to work in peace. We can't keep fighting all the time. They [the PWC] want us to raise the issue of terminated workers, but the management does not even want to hear about it. What can we do? We have to look after our jobs first. What will happen

> if the management gets us arrested? There are still so many policemen in the plant and in IMT [Manesar]. So many people had been arrested for no reasons. We can't take that risk. (Manesar union member, December 17, 2015)

While the moral solidarity existed for the jailed workers, the political solidarity had vanished by the end of 2014 and differences among workers emerged on the need for continued support for the terminated and jailed workers. There was a brief discussion among workers to hold a tool-down strike on July 18, 2014 in support of the jailed workers, but the management came to know about it and issued a letter to the union that if a strike action was taken, the union members would be terminated from work. In addition, there was a growing disquiet among the rank and file who did not want to "dwell in the past" by fighting for the terminated workers. The terminated and the jailed workers were called "*baharwala*" [outsiders], and workers considered it impractical to fight for them. The pressure from the management, past action of the police, and the growing influence of MUKU contributed to this situation.

The PWC-led Maruti movement for justice was gradually confined to the release of the jailed workers, while the issue of mass termination of workers took a backseat. The movement attracted the attention and participation of civil society, but the working masses in the region stayed away. State intervention following the violent incident and warnings issued by the management discouraged workers from participating in the movement. The plant-based unions in the region who had actively participated in the Maruti strikes in 2011, did not come out in support of the terminated and jailed workers.[89] The Manesar union was ambivalent: it neither dissociated itself from the terminated workers nor did it take any strike action in the plant to support them. It also asked the PWC to dissolve as a new union had been elected and there was no need for a provisional union. Unlike in the past (during the

[89] Denigration of the workers outside with expressions like as *baharwale* (outsiders) or *chhate hue* (terminated) became common among unions. It became a lost cause worthy only of sympathy and platitudes.

union formation struggle), the rank-and-file adopted a more compromising posture and stayed away from political support to the embattled workers outside the plant. Along with the fear of state coercion and management reprisal, reformism had affected workers' consciousness. The permanent workers did not want to lose their job or the benefits it entailed.

AITUC and HMS stayed away from the movement. The Trade Union Council (TUC) (formed during the strikes in 2011) had already become defunct, and no initiative was taken by these CTUs to mobilise support among workers in Gurgaon and Manesar. The distance between the permanent workers and the CTs increased mainly due to differences in benefits, wages, job security, short term contracts and the absence of a collective memory of struggle. In addition, reformist politics had taken root among the union as well as the workers as solidarity between different categories of workers had given way to following a 'practical approach' on the issue of CTs and the outside workers (both the jailed and terminated).

While workers' politics inside the plant became quiescent, the Maruti movement provided an opportunity for the emergence of two labour organisations in the region. The members of the PWC, several militant workers who had been terminated from work in different plants, the MSIL unions, and the Suzuki plant unions came on one platform and formed Workers' Solidarity Centre (WSC) in June 2014. The main motive behind the establishment of WSC was to provide a militant alternative to the CTUs. Amit, a labour activist and the organising secretary of WSC, said:

> Termination of militant workers is very common in this belt. If the workers try to form a union, the leading workers would be immediately terminated or suspended. The CTUs rarely do anything once the workers are terminated even if the union is affiliated with them. We wanted to provide a platform for such workers from different sectors like auto, pharmaceutical and other sectors. Another motive was to arrange

> financial assistance for workers who had been terminated, but are still fighting for workers like the Maruti PWC. The most important goal is to support workers regardless of their affiliations [with the CTUs]. In this belt, if a union is affiliated to HMS, AITUC won't support when needed. The reverse is also true. We wanted to fill that gap and provide legal assistance and ideas on strategy to workers in this industrial belt. (Amit, December 4, 2015)

Most of the PWC members became a part of the WSC, and a coordination committee was formed to support different plant-based struggles taking place in the industrial landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal. The PWC-led movement had been isolated from broader working class in the region by mid-2014. The WSC sought to mobilise workers in the region, provide legal help to unions and worker, and fight labour cases of the terminated Maruti workers.[90] The WSC gradually increased its presence among workers by participating in labour conflicts in Asti Electronics, air conditioner maker Daikin, Hero Honda's Kapurthala plant (Dharuhera), and auto components maker Lumax Auto. It also mobilised workers in support of the general strikes organised by the CTUs by campaigning in working class neighbourhoods and factory gates. Under the leadership of WSC and the PWC, the first *Majdoor Nyay* Convention (Workers Justice Convention) was held on February 27, 2015, followed by a second Convention on November 26, 2015. In the conventions workers demanded release of the jailed Maruti workers, fair treatment to workers in the region, and the right to form unions. The CTUs, plant-based unions in Gurgaon-Manesar, and auto unions from different parts of India participated in the convention. Social movement organisations such as Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM) and Jan Sangharsh Manch (JSM), democratic rights organisation Peoples' Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) participated in the convention. However, the rank and file, contract workers in various plants were

[90] The cases against termination of 548 permanent workers is still going on in the Gurgaon Labour Courts. Given the nature of justice delivery in labour cases, not much is expected from these cases.

conspicuous by their absence in the convention. The conventions neither outlined any future political strategy for the Maruti workers nor for the ordinary working masses in the region. The contentious relation between the Maruti workers and the CTUs continued despite sharing the stage to mark a show of solidarity. The CTUs alleged that the Maruti workers used them and invited them to protest they organised, but when it came to participating events organised by the CTUs, the Maruti workers did not turn up. Expressing disappointment with the selective participation of MSWU, Satbir Singh from CITU remarked,

> The Maruti people (the MSIL unions in Gurgaon and Manesar plant) want everything their own way. They take our suggestions, but do what pleases them. They rarely turn up in our events or take part in the general strikes. A few days back, we organised a protest event against rising oil prices, labour reforms and privatisation. MSWU didn't come to this event. (Satbir Singh, December 10, 2015)

Following a convention of auto workers' convention in November, 2015, the major auto unions like Hyundai, Tata Motors, Bajaj, Toyota Kirloskar among others deliberated on the formation of a federation of auto unions along the lines of United Auto Workers (UAW) and Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) combining all OEMs and the plants in the supply chain. Talks fell apart on the question of remaining independent of the CTUs. While the unions in the Gurgaon-Manesar were in favour of remaining independent, the unions in other auto clusters such as Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) and Pune-Chakan region favoured working with the CTUs. Unions in Hyundai Motors Corporation, Tata Motors, Bajaj Auto, Toyota Kirloskar argued for aligning with the CTUs to fight for their rights. The unions, however, did not discuss how to include the contract workers in any future organising efforts.

A new organisation was formed in the MSIL and Suzuki plants in 2014, when unions in MSIL's two plants in Gurgaon and Manesar plants and Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Bike

formed an umbrella organisation called Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh (Maruti Suzuki Workers' Organisation) (MSMS) with the aim of collectively representing workers in these four plants. The combined strength of all the permanent workers in the four plants numbered around 8,000 out of which approximately 5,500 workers were from the two MSIL plants in Gurgaon and Manesar. The general secretary of MUKU and the convener of MSMS, Kuldeep Jhangu, put the purpose of building such an organisation in the following words:

> You see the managements of all the plants are the same, so why should we be divided? We also wanted to maintain a distance from the CTUs. *They drag us into their struggles* [general strikes, anti-government protests] and we don't want to be a part of these struggles. HMS always works for a middle path, but CITU and AITUC are against the government all the time. They are against everything and everyone, from Hooda and Khattar to Manmohan Singh and Modi. We can't function as a trade union if we always criticise the government. We can't afford hostility from the government. We have to maintain a balance between all the forces in society-the management, the administration, government, the trade unions [CTUs] and society. We also want to help the tier I and II supply chains; there are hundreds of them who work for Maruti. We want our separate union, separate from the CTUs. Our strength is more than 5000 [permanent workers of the three plants combined] … we can do anything. But we want a peaceful industrial climate. We won't let another Manesar event [the July 18 incident] happen. (Kuldeep Jhanghu, December 3, 2015)

MUKU had always taken a conciliatory stand towards the management and seldom participated in general strikes or in any other protest events which concerned the workers beyond the factory gates of the Gurgaon plant. After the formation of MSMS, the Manesar union also took a similar stand and distanced itself from labour politics which raised issues common to workers across India. The general strikes since 2014 have been called against

privatisation of state resources, labour law reforms, and increasing contractualisation. The CTUs demanded increase in minimum wage, and unionisation rights for all workers including contract workers. When probed on the reasons for maintaining a distance from the general strikes, MSWU president Azmair explained:

> We have to look after our plant first and only then we can think about what is happening outside. We know that what the unions [CTUs] are doing is important, but the management is adamant that we don't join these strikes, or else they will deduct eight day's salary for one day's participation. We can't afford this. The common workers are also not in favour of joining these strikes. (Azmair, November 24, 2015)

Although the MSWU realised the importance of the issues involved in the general strikes and protests done by the CTUs, they did not join them for fear of the management. They erroneously believed that they could protect their jobs by not participating in these strikes which raise workers' general demands in the country. [91]

During the collective bargaining, the MSMS took over from the plant-based unions. As the MSIL management always favoured the MUKU for its conciliatory stance on workers' issues, it became the most powerful constituent in the MSMS. After its formation, any pretense of supporting non-permanent workers in the plants was dropped by the unions. In addition, the Manesar workers lost their plant level autonomy they had gained after the strikes and union formation.

[91] A reluctance to make common cause with workers is costing workers their jobs. The privatization process is in full swing with airlines, trains, banks, insurance companies, telephone companies being privatised in breakneck speed. VRS is being introduced in the OEMs as well as Tier I suppliers in the auto industry. The labour reforms, which had been introduced partially by the states are going to be implemented at the central level affecting all the industries. Several provisions are going to push back the resurgence of working class struggles in the industry to several decades. However, all these developments have been lost on the Maruti workers who still believe they could save their jobs and benefits in the face of an impending restructuring in the workforce and an onslaught launched by the state in the form of labour laws. This is the limitation of a placed based struggle. The strength was that it did not listen to the CTUs when they asked to compromise.

The negotiations for a new settlement began in April, 2015 in all the three plants of MSIL and Suzuki Motorbike. An agreement was reached between the MSMS and the management in September. While the permanent workers got a pay hike, health insurance benefits and housing loan facilities, the CTs in the Manesar plant and the contract workers did not get any benefits. Their demand for transport facilities and health insurance was rejected. The permanent workers agreed to not engage in 'anti-company' activities. Unlike the first union in 2012, the MSWU agreed to not raise the issues of the CTs regarding wages and extending terms of the short-term contract. The wage gap between the permanent workers and the CTs increased more than threefold: the permanent workers' monthly waged hovered around 45,000-50,000 rupees, while the CTs got 10,000-16,000 depending on the trades they were hired for.

On September 26, 2015, more than 1,000 CTs struck work and organised a sit-in at the entrance of the Manesar plant. They demanded a salary hike which had been ignored in the settlement between the management and the union and accused the union of betrayal. They refused mediation by the union, and instead asked the management to negotiate with them directly. In order to resolve the deadlock, political representatives from nearby villages reached the factory gate to threaten the workers to resume work. The workers refused and continued the sit-in. Within hours, police and RAF reached the gate and used force to disperse workers. More than 100 workers were injured and over 200 workers were arrested and taken to the Manesar police station. Two PWC members who had reached the plant to support the striking workers were also arrested. Later on, the workers were released after they signed an undertaking not to engage in protests or agitation inside the plant (FMS, Oct, 2015). The union refused to protest against police action against the CTs. This incident further created conflict between the PWC and the union. While PWC argued that the union should support the trainees, the union asked the PWC to stay away from plant politics. The

management fired 300 trainees on disciplinary grounds. Following the protests, the salary of the trainees was increased by 1,300 rupees per month.

While the political solidarity between permanent and non-permanent workers in the Manesar plant collapsed, the PWC-led Maruti movement lost momentum by the end of 2015 in the absence of support from the wider working class in the region. After 2016, the Maruti movement became a struggle to release the jailed workers. The bail applications had been rejected multiple times by different courts since 2012 even as the trials continued. On March 10, 2017, the Gurgaon sessions court acquitted[92] 117 workers and convicted 31 workers including the union members and Jiya Lal[93] who were sentenced to life imprisonment, four were given five years imprisonment, and 14 workers were let off with the years they had already served in the prison (Behl, 2017). The trial came to an end after five years. The defence counsel in the Maruti case raised several questions to the prosecution. Appearing for the accused, lawyer Rebecca John challenged the conviction and argued that,

> from dramatically changing the weapons of offence as stated in the FIR, to not being able to prove who started the fire and how a matchbox, cited as evidence, was found completely intact down room-the police had done everything to fabricate and embellish the case (Bhatnagar, 2017).

Senior lawyer of the Supreme Court, Vrinda Grover, who was a part of the legal team for Maruti workers, said to me during a telephone interview:

> The entire case was fabricated. The courts are now more concerned with the economic impact of strikes and union formation rather than judging a case based on evidence.

[92] For a penetrating critique of the judgement and its loopholes, see PUDR, 2018.
[93] Jiya Lal was denied bail despite worsening health conditions and died of cancer in June, 2021.

> Clearly, neoliberal policies are having a deeper impact on the nature of judicial verdicts.[94]

She further pointed out that several accused had not been identified by the witness, but still they were charged with murder and questioned the authenticity of the witnesses who claimed to have seen the workers in the plant in an alphabetical order (Yadav, 2014).[95]

During arguments in the sessions court in March, 2017, Vikas Pahwa, a lawyer for MSIL demanded strict punishment and said, "Government of India is promoting 'Make in India,'[96] and with this kind of volatile environment and industrial unrest no country would come forward and invest in India." (PUDR, 2018, p, 26). There was a consensus among the judicial fraternity that labour unrest could jeopardise the friendly climate of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India. The judiciary saw workers' assertion as a hurdle to a peaceful industrial climate with complete disregard for their rights and signalled to the capitalist class through this verdict that any incident of violence against capital would not be tolerated. The verdict represented the capitulation of state institutions to capital in neoliberal India.

Protests were organised against the verdict by CTUs and the MSIL and Suzuki unions. While no strike action or large-scale demonstrations took place, workers in the MSIL's Manesar plant boycotted lunch a day after the verdict was given. MSMS held a meeting in Gurgaon and denounced the verdict and demanded the release of the jailed workers. Apart from these limited protests, the working class in the region accepted the defeat of the movement.

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[94] Vrinda Grover made these comments during a telephonic interview on April 20, 2017.

[95] Yadav (2014) examined court documents and found out a grave anomaly in the testimony of the witnesses. Court documents showed witness Virendra alias Rajender Yadav named 25 workers such that all workers' names fall in the alphabetical range of A-G. Another witness contractor Yaad Ram testified that he saw 25 workers rioting all of whose names fall in the next range G-P. Witness Ashok Rana names 26 workers who were allegedly rioting whose names range from P-S. The final witness Rakesh of Tirupati Associates who supplied 900 contract workers to MSIL testified to allegedly seeing 13 workers whose names, continuing the alphabetic sequence, are in the range S-Y.

[96] The Make in India programme was launched by the current Prime Minister in 2014 in order to promote manufacturing in India by attracting foreign investment.

The Maruti movement began with illegal and spontaneous strikes. It later on became more political when the PWC-led movement confronted the state. However, it followed a path of legalism after the sessions' court's verdict. MSWU and other unions in Manesar and Gurgaon did not organise any protests against the management after 2017. The July 18 anniversary became an occasion to celebrate the past struggle without any concrete plan of action for future political struggle. A class struggle that had shaken the auto industry in 2011 and a directly confronted the state after 2012 withered away. A radical class consciousness that revealed the close relations between the state institutions and capital gave way to conventional and reformist trade union consciousness and spontaneous struggles and militant particularism (Harvey, 1996) reached its limits.

6.5 Conclusion

The Maruti workers became assertive in the plant following the formation of a union after a protracted class struggle with the management. Along with the demanding better working conditions on the shop floor, increase in wages, better transport facilities, more secure jobs, the workers made several political demands which were uncommon in the automobile landscape of Gurgaon-Manesar. Demands were made for parity between permanent and contract workers, equal pay for equal work, and changing the terms of employment of contract workers and making them permanent. These demands reflected the solidarity and unity between workers and resonated with contract workers in the region mired in precarity for long. However, these demands were non-negotiable for the management because of its radical impact on class relations in the company and in the auto industry as well. The negotiations dragged on for over three months. It was when the workers were considering a strike action, a minor event of altercation between a supervisor and a worker turned into a major flash point which was used by the management and the state to restructure the balance of forces in the region. The altercation led to violence in the plant, leading to the death of a

senior management official. More than 2,000 workers were retrenched with no prior permission of the state. What was significant after this incident was the role played by the state. It openly shed its appearance of a neutral arbiter between contending forces (workers and the management) and revealed its class character by coercing workers into submission. While during the strikes in 2011, the provincial state stayed away from open confrontation with the workers, the violent incident provided an opportunity for the state to suppress an assertive working class.

The state did not allow protests to support the Maruti workers. The IMT Manesar bore resemblance to a militarised zone when large contingents of police force were permanently deployed, both in fear of a new uprising by workers and to quell and large-scale protests by workers against police atrocity. MSIL restructured the workforce of the plant after it opened following a month-long lockout in August 2012. Instead of contract workers, CTs were hired on short-term contracts (6-7 months). Workers and supervisors were transferred from the Gurgaon plant. These steps were taken to break any basis of solidarity among permanent workers and between permanent and non-permanent workers. The workers inside the Manesar plant were warned against participating in events or engage in strike action to support the retrenched and jailed workers. The actions of the MSIL management and the repressive actions by the state had a cascading effect on the working class in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon. The unions and the workers who had supported the strikes in 2011 no longer contemplated any strike activity or protests and demonstrations supporting the embattled workers. The violent incident was used by the management and the state to suppress an assertive working class and it had a dampening effect on the class consciousness of workers. Instead of building solidarities for the embattled workers and further advancing the cause of non-permanent workers (contract workers and CTs), the Maruti workers adopted the politics of reformism and compromise. The solidarity among workers in the wake of the Maruti

strike-cutting across trade union and plant-based affinities withered away in the face of criminalisation of the Maruti workers and the state repression that followed the violent incident.

The retrenched workers, however, took a different path. Faced with state oppression, they organised discreetly by forming a committee called the PWC and mobilised the Maruti workers who had scattered owing to the fear of arrests and harassment by the state. Since the spaces of IMT Manesar and Gurgaon were out of bounds for these workers due to state intervention, they used the spaces of Haryana's rural hinterland and their community ties to fight for the jailed workers and their own illegal retrenchment. The PWC-led movement built solidarity with CSOs and smaller but militant labour organisations and took out protest march and demonstrations across Haryana. The movement also received support from the caste-based Khap Panchayats in rural Haryana who played a paradoxical role. The Khaps from the rural localities in close proximity to Manesar supported the company, while the Khaps in Haryana's rural hinterland further away from the industrial town supported the Maruti workers. The PWC sought support for the movement from both the caste associations and social movement organisations such as JSM. The workers felt the need to prove their innocence to the to the society (*samaj*). The community ties of workers were intact despite having worked in an advanced auto industry. Workers were conscious of their class position, and simultaneously were embedded in the rural society. These two positions were not mutually exclusive as the Subaltern Studies school led by Chakraborty (1989) suggested in the context of jute mill workers in colonial Bengal. The consciousness of being members of a class coexisted with the consciousness of being members of a feudal social structure. Marx, in his later writings on colonialism in India has highlighted the revolutionary potential of agrarian societies in a revolutionary upheaval (Ahmed, 1992). In contrast to a unilinear view of history ascribed to Marx, Anderson (2016) argues that Marx viewed feudal societies

containing elements for a socialist revolution and a class politics that is built on the existing social identities in these societies. This support from the *Khaps* culminated in a major protest in Kaithal against the Minister of Industries. Coercive police action, however, scattered the workers and their supporters, including the *Khaps*. The intervention of the state stripped the workers of any illusion of the efficacy of the mobilising the feudal elements for their cause.

Space was constitutive of class struggle between the Maruti workers and the state. Workers' consciousness was spatially divided: a consciousness inside the spaces of production (the plants) and outside. After the violent incident, the state did not allow the workers to organise either in Manesar or Gurgaon, and pushed them into the rural hinterland of Haryana. On the eve of the first anniversary of the incident, the Gurgaon district administration denied permission to the PWC to hold meetings in Manesar by imposing Section 144. Similarly, the workers were not allowed to stage protests in working class neighbourhoods or in places that are in close proximity to the factories. Workers ultimately held a meeting in a middle class neighbourhood far away from the city of Gurgaon. By blocking access to space, the state institutions sought to blunt the class struggle of the Maruti workers. The workers, however, were not the passive victims of state's spatial strategy. Workers organised themselves and assumed new political identities that were defined by both their class position (Maruti workers) and regional identity ('Haryana boys'). Instead of dispersing in the face of state suppression, workers developed ingenious ways to fight back by establishing links with the Khap panchayats. Denied access to the space of Gurgaon and Manesar, the PWC-led movement organised across villages in Haryana to press for their demands. Workers made use of the space beyond any specific village, especially after the police crackdown in Kaithal in May 2013. Although the strategy of organising in villages did not compensate the need for organising workers in the industrial landscape, it kept the

movement alive amidst lacklustre support from the CTUs, company-based unions in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon, and the reformist politics of the MSWU.

Workers' consciousness was mediated by a number of factors in the process of the development of the movement which put limits on workers' consciousness. The legal path that workers followed in the third phase of the movement was not automatic but was determined by active coercive intervention by the state and restructuring strategies adopted by the management inside the plant. Capital and state acted in an organic manner; the state acted to protect the interests of capital (MSIL). The space of Gurgaon-Manesar remained outside of the reach for the workers due to state intervention.

The Maruti movement betrayed a contradictory element of working class politics in the region. During the strikes in 2011 and the movement which emerged in the post-July 18 incident, the Maruti workers took a militant stand vis-à-vis the management, while the larger unions (central unions) argued for a more compromising politics. However, the new union, which was elected in 2014, stayed away from general issues that affected workers cutting across regional and sectoral divides. This separation from wider working class issues was not confined to MSWU alone, but a feature of plant-based trade union politics in the region. The central unions gave importance to a working class politics at the national scale, while the MSWU (and other plant-based unions in the region) operated more locally, i.e. at the scale of the plant. The dialectic between the local and the national was missing to the detriment of workers' interest.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

According to Marxist theory, revolutionary practice is premised on revolutionary theory. This theory is based on a scientific understanding of the functioning of capitalism, including the dynamics of workers' subjectivity. Class consciousness is defined as a correct awareness of objective material conditions, recognition of the irreconcilability of class interests with the capitalists and the presence of solidarity among the workers. This consciousness operates on a spectrum, traversing through pre-trade union spontaneity, trade union consciousness, and revolutionary consciousness. The journey from spontaneity (including in its trade union form) to revolutionary or class consciousness, however, is neither inevitable nor linear. Contradiction "understood as the incompatible development of different elements within the same relation" (Ollman, 2003, p. 17) is an important element of class consciousness in this journey.

Working class self-activity forms the most elementary basis of class consciousness and class struggle. Consciousness and struggle are not two separate elements. Much rather, they are interrelated. Class consciousness has both subjective and objective aspects. Subjective awareness of the objective material conditions is only one aspect of consciousness. Subjective awareness takes an objective form when it is transformed into – expressed as – practical activity by a large number of people in the forms of strikes, political movements, and attendant structural transformations. Thus, class consciousness and class struggle are dialectically inter-related. While the impact of general mechanisms such as the degrees of industrialisation and urbanisation, the state structure, economic suffering and the

political subordination of the working class on class consciousness remain common across space, the place-based specificities also play an important role in shaping this consciousness. Religiosity, ethnic identity, caste relations, prior history of working class movements and organisations and sedimented memories associated with this history interact with class consciousness in multiple ways. A dialectical account of class consciousness offers insights into place-based specificities and its complex interaction with the general mechanisms that enables and impedes class consciousness. Informed by Marxist and radical theoretical ideas about class consciousness and class struggle, my dissertation is about the workers' self-activity in the burgeoning auto industry in India explored from the vantage point of a specific place. It highlights the specific mediations and contradictions of consciousness peculiar to the industrial workers in India. It also makes the case for a general applicability of the findings to the wider working class in the world.

7. 2 Research Findings

The growth of the auto industry in India has been based on the growth of a labour market dominated by precarity, low wages and adverse working conditions. Labour conflicts have become a recurrent feature as a result. Indeed, most of the militant industrial strikes after the economic reforms in the 1990s have occurred in the auto industry, which happens to be concentrated in specific parts of the country, including the National Capital Region of Delhi and surrounding areas. These strikes have been over issues such as contractualisation of work, low wages, increasing work intensity, and denial of trade union rights. The location of the industry in regions with no prior industrial base ensured workers did not have a place-based history of working class struggles to rely on. Early unionisation efforts were always blocked often leading to strikes and large-scale violence by the workers in several plants. However, in companies such as MSIL, business unionism was promoted in order to make

workers loyal to the company and to keep the Central Trade Unions (CTUs)[97] away from organising workers in the plant. Having a union unaffiliated with the CTUs did not, however, prevent the workers from engaging in a three-months strike over the issue of incentives in 2000-01. The union was busted following the strike. This marked the beginning of a decade in which workers' voices were suppressed until strikes broke out in the Manesar plant of MSIL. Both in the OEMs and in the vast supply chain, contract workers made up the majority of the workforce. Although the strikes over unionisation were fought by both permanent and contract workers, the latter were a part of neither the unions nor the collective bargaining agreements. The exclusion of contract workers resulted from a legal provision that barred workers employed by labour contractors and agencies from joining the union. Moreover, the CTUs failed to look beyond conventional trade unionism that relied on permanent workers in the manufacturing sector. Faced with an exponential rise in the number of contract workers in the auto industry,[98] trade union struggles, despite their militancy, remained confined to permanent workers who constitute a small section of the workforce. It is in this context that the workers' struggle in MSIL's Manesar plant became a rallying point for workers in the auto cluster of Manesar-Gurgaon, cutting across employment status and the narrow confines of a single plant.

MSIL established its second plant in IMT Manesar in 2006-07. The plant ran with trainee workers and contract workers for the first three years. Only one third of the workers out of a workforce of 3000 workers became permanent by the end of 2009. However, wage difference between permanent and contract workers was marginal. The plant did not have a separate union. All the permanent workers were considered a part of the union based in the

[97] Central Trade Unions (CTUs) are trade unions that operate at the national level and are affiliated with different political parties. Company-based unions affiliate with these CTUs in order to derive more bargaining power vis-a vis the management. Although the CTUs take part in place-based and sector-based struggles (e.g., in a specific region or industry such as steel, auto, coal), they over issues which affect workers across sectors at the national level, the issues that are both political and economic.

[98] For a discussion on the rise of contract workers in the Indian auto industry, see Section 3.3 of chapter 3.

Gurgaon plant. Faced with strenuous working conditions, low wages, and repressive living conditions, Maruti's Manesar workers decided to form a union, which required them to struggle for it in the face of opposition from the company. Workers' decision to seek a solution to their problems by forming a union independent of the company emerged spontaneously. The working and living conditions, along with the spatiality of trade union ideology and the recent history of class struggle in the region (post 2000), shaped the consciousness of workers.

Along with the materiality of extremely adverse working and living conditions, three strikes in the Gurgaon-Manesar auto cluster played a crucial role in shaping the political consciousness of the Maruti workers, although in a contradictory manner. The three-months strike organised by the MUEU in the Gurgaon plant in 2000-01 ended in a defeat for the workers that saw de-recognition of the union, termination of the militant workers, forceful imposition of the VRS scheme, and reduction in the number of permanent workers in the plant. The failure of the strike also revealed the class bias of the state and its institutions in favour of the company. While the failure of the strike along with the de-recognition of the union, and termination of the militant workers initially discouraged workers from fighting for a separate union, the strikes to form new unions at HMSI in 2005 and Rico Industries in 2009 had a positive impact on workers. These two strikes played a crucial role in shaping workers consciousness. Moreover, among these two unions, the HMSI union had a more determining impact on the Manesar workers because of its reputation as a strong union and its spatial proximity to the Manesar plant which provided the workers an opportunity to engage politically with a union for the first time. Also, the imagery of the HMSI union as an ideal organisation for workers played a contradictory role for the Maruti workers: first, it motivated them to fight for a union to improve their working and living conditions; second, the imagery also put limits on the workers' political consciousness in terms of what is possible and

achievable by excluding alternative possibilities such as organising through radical political parties and making a common cause with workers across geographical locations and industries.

The Maruti workers applied to the labour department to form a separate union which was rejected on the grounds of not carrying legitimate signature by the permanent workers. Following the rejection, the management coerced the workers to accept the Gurgaon plant-based union. The AITUC and its affiliated union HMSI, advised the Manesar workers to fight a legal battle. However, workers spontaneously stopped production and occupied the factory. The Indian working class as a whole is divided along social identities based on caste, religion, region, and intra-class hierarchy on the basis of permanent and contract workers and these divisions act as barriers to the emergence of class consciousness among the workers. The working class politics in the auto industry also betrayed these divisions. More specifically, regional identity and the divisions based on the nature of employment (permanent vs contract workers) played a detrimental role against the unity of workers in the industry, and the Maruti workers were not immune to these divisions. The wildcat strike provided an opportunity for the workers to rise above the internal barriers based on employment status and regional identity, and put up a united front against working and living conditions that affected all workers. The initial influence of AITUC and HMSI union declined when the Maruti workers adopted militant approach against a recourse to a legal path against management coercion. After the strike ended, the shop floor became a contested terrain between an assertive working class and defensive management. The workers stayed away from the HMSI and AITUC and treaded an independent path even when they considered affiliating with HMS, another CTU active in the region. In order to change the balance of forces and subdue the workers, the management brought in a GCU which it had used successfully against workers during the striking workers in the Gurgaon plant a decade

prior. Upon refusal to sign the GCU, workers were locked out for a month. Workers used the lockout to reach out to other unions and workers in IMT Manesar and Gurgaon. Gate meetings, demonstrations and protests march to labour department became an everyday event and helped the Maruti workers avoid isolation they had faced during the first wildcat strike inside the plant. The solidarity between the Maruti workers and workers from other plants spread widely when the permanent workers struck in support of the contract workers who were denied entry after the lockout was lifted. Workers called off the strike following a judicial intervention. The union members were forced to leave the plant to create a leadership vacuum and impose a management- nominated Works Council by the management. This, however, did not discourage the workers as another layer of leadership emerged to continue the struggle that began with the wildcat strike. Finally, the workers succeeded in registering a union which was independent from the union based in the Gurgaon plant; it also remained independent from the CTUs.

The union formation struggle at the Manesar plant revealed the contradictions of working class politics in the auto industry. The wildcat strike marked progress in workers' consciousness when they broke free from the conventional legal path of struggle. During the lockout and the second strike, the Maruti workers displayed growth of class consciousness when they forged solidarity with workers from other plants in the IMT Manesar. The simultaneous strikes in several plants betrayed the emergence of a class consciousness beyond the factory gates of Maruti's Manesar plant. The strikes also marked the possibilities of a place-based struggle to spiral into the expression of a general discontent among auto workers in the region. The Maruti workers asserted their autonomy in consciousness and action vis-à-vis the CTUs, who advocated against militant political action. This autonomy, however, was constrained. The actions of the workers were militant, but the consciousness was constrained by existing trade union-ist ideology, which put forming a union at the centre

of working class politics. The workers' attitude towards the state institutions revealed a contradictory character. While the workers recognised the antagonism that existed between them and the provincial-scale organs of the Indian state which intervened in favour of the management, they continued to appeal to the political representatives (e.g., Ministers), who inhabit the state institutions, to resolve the crisis in their favour. Such an action betrays an inadequate conception of the class character of the state.

The solidarity among workers was reflected in the union's demands during collective bargaining negotiations. The demands such as equal pay for equal work and making all contract workers permanent reflected working class politics in the auto industry that only relied on furthering the interests of the permanent workers during collective bargaining settlements. After the management refused to accept the demands of contract workers, the negotiations reached a dead end. The workers became more assertive on the shop floor and resisted humiliating practices resorted to by the floor supervisors. Even as the negotiations had stalled, a minor altercation between a supervisor and a worker led to violence in the plant leading to the death of a senior management official. This incident followed several other violent incidents in auto industry across India such as Ghaziabad-based Italian firm Graziano Transmission, and Indo-Japanese firm Allied Nippon, and Tamil Nadu based firm Pricol (Madhavan, 2012; Manuel, 2017). While the Maruti the workers accused the management of instigating violence, the management blamed the workers for destruction of property in the plant and the death of the official. Although this violent incident is still shrouded in mystery and no responsibility has been fixed so far, it changed the course of the Maruti struggle. It provided an opportunity to the management to crush a militant working class movement with a potential to spread to the entire automobile landscape.

Largescale retrenchment and state repression followed the violent incident in the plant. With the arrest of the union executive and several militant workers, the IMT Manesar

resembled a militarised space. Large contingents of police were deployed to quell any workers' uprising. In order to prevent solidarity among the workers in the Manesar plant, the Maruti management restructured the labour regime inside the plant by introducing short-term contracts and transferring workers from its Gurgaon plant. The management forced a settlement on the workers without any negotiations. Furthermore, the management warned workers against expressing solidarity with the imprisoned and retrenched workers. While the management succeeded in obtaining the acquiescence or consent of the workers inside the plant, the retrenched workers launched a movement against state repression, violation of human rights of the imprisoned workers, and illegal retrenchment. In the absence of support from auto workers in Gurgaon-Manesar owing to state repression, the militants among the retrenched workers formed a Provisional Working Committee (PWC) and turned to local community ties and civil society organisations to garner support for their struggle. While CTUs such as AITUC and HMS distanced from the movement, CITU supported the movement in rural Haryana where it had a base among the construction workers, government scheme workers such as Anganwadi and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers and roadways workers.[99] In the wake of the violent incident at the Manesar plant, the provincial state denied access to the workers to organise protests in the urban space of Gurgaon, in the industrial cluster IMT Manesar and in the working class neighbourhoods. Instead of accepting passively the spatial strategy of the state, the workers moved to the rural spaces of Haryana to mobilise fellow workers and social institutions such as the Panchayats and used the consciousness of regional identity embedded in those spaces. They fought as workers while simultaneously mobilising their regional identity as Haryanvi boys (boys of Haryana) and community ties based on local caste-based

[99] The central government and provincial governments run a number of welfare programmes and the workers employed in these programmes are called government scheme workers. In several cases, these workers are unionised and are affiliated with one of the CTUs. CITU has been more successful in organising these workers than workers in the industrial belt including the auto workers.

associations knowns as *Khaps*. However, organising in the rural hinterland of Haryana in the wake of denial of access to space in Gurgaon and Manesar did not compensate for the need to organise and to seek the support of auto workers in the industrial landscape. The support and participation of auto workers in the Maruti workers' union formation struggle had withered away because of state repression, the fear of management reprisal, and most importantly, absence of organisations to mobilise workers' discontent in the region. The CTUs and the TUC's support for the Maruti movement was perfunctory, while the plant-based unions also stayed away from the Maruti workers' struggle. The conflict between the CTUs and the Maruti workers manifested in different forms throughout the movement. The Maruti workers opted for more militant approach in contrast to the legal-centric approach preferred and suggested by the CTUs that exclusively focused on organising permanent workers. This contestation between the Maruti workers and the CTUs continued during the struggle against the state and the management following the violent incident in the plant in 2012. The militant approach of Maruti workers, however, underwent a change after a new union was elected in 2014. This union as well as workers stayed away from any issue that concerned the working class in general. While the CTUs protested against far-reaching changes in labour laws and privatisation, demanded increase in minimum wages, and organised general strikes against anti-worker policies of the government, the Maruti union and MSMS, the federation consisting of car plants in Manesar and Gurgaon, Suzuki powertrain and Suzuki bike, stayed away from these protest demonstrations. These union, focused solely on the collective bargaining in their own plants and followed a unionism that they started against.

Several factors mediated the class consciousness of the Maruti workers in the process of the development of the movement. The solidarity between permanent and the contract workers resulted not only from a shared experience between workers during the struggle for union formation but also from their interaction with militant labour activists from smaller but

radical political organisations. These activists played a crucial role in the movement and operated outside of the trade unions, including the CTUs. Workers' struggle to demand justice for the imprisoned and retrenched workers was determined by the active intervention of the state and restructuring strategies adopted by the management inside the plant. While the retrenched workers continued to organise, the permanent workers inside the plant shunned any pretense of a class struggle because of the fear of management reprisal and state repression and acquiescence to the terms of the settlement which worked in favour of the permanent workers and drove a wedge between the permanent and non-permanent workers. The balance of forces decisively shifted in favour of the management when in 2017, the Sessions courts in Gurgaon sentenced life imprisonment to all the union members of the Manesar plant. Thus, a movement with a radical potential to spread beyond the narrow confines of a single plant was brought under control through coercive state intervention (e.g., police action), restructuring of the workforce, and judicial verdict against the workers. The Maruti movement showed that there is no inevitability about the growth of class consciousness. It is neither fated to materialize nor is it impossible. It traverses through many contradictory moments, mediated by self-organising of the working class, political organisations including trade unions, and class struggle from above represented by capital and the state.

7.3 Contribution to the Academic Literature

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature in the following three ways.

First, I try to show that the development of class consciousness is a contradictory historical and geographical process. There is nothing inevitable about this consciousness; each given stage in the development of consciousness is permeated with a real and a potential transformation of consciousness, as if to suggest that the present is pregnant with glimpses of

the future in the realm of workers' consciousness. Lenin (1902) provided us with a notion of class consciousness that traversed from spontaneity to trade union consciousness, and finally reached revolutionary class consciousness. The final stage of class consciousness can be reached only by political organisation/s imbued with Marxist theory. Strikes mark an important phase in the development of class consciousness, although the nature of this consciousness could be trade unionist and reformist. Scholars have highlighted the varied impact of strikes in class consciousness literature, as I have discussed in chapter 5 (Blackburn, 1967; Callinicos & Simons, 1985; Hyman, 1972, 1974; Kelly, 1988; Langford, 1994; McCall, 2008; Moody & Cohen, 1998). The focus in this literature has been on the impact of strikes on consciousness, but it ignores why a specific form of consciousness leads to a specific form of strike. For instance, the consciousness that informs a wildcat and spontaneous strike is different from a consciousness that informs a legal strike that operates within the framework laid down by labour laws. The consciousness that informs a legal strike is different from a strike that assumes a general character, i.e., a general strike. Additionally, strikes at one plant may have a limiting impact on workers' consciousness in that particular plant, but it could lead to an emergence of a more radical consciousness in another plant/s. In other words, the spatial impact of strikes on class consciousness is also varied. Drawing on Wills' (1996) insights on translation of trade union struggles across space and time, I have specifically emphasised the fact that a strike in a given place, including one that has failed could galvanise class struggle in that place immediately or it could positively impact workers in another place in another time. This was clearly the case with the Maruti workers' struggle in the Manesar plant in 2011. These workers' consciousness was shaped by the lessons from a failed strike in Maruti's Gurgaon plant in 2000-01 as well as successful strikes by Honda and Rico workers in 2005 and 2009 respectively. Thus, working class consciousness does not

develop in a linear manner but progresses in a contradictory way within the limits imposed by ideology, working class organisations, and state institutions.

Second, working class consciousness can and does overcome non-class social divisions and identities to fight for class interests. This holds true for India where non-class identities are often counterposed with caste and other non-class-based identity and consciousness to deny the primacy of class and class-based politics in India (Chibber, 2014, 2020; Singh, 2014, 2023). Scholars have argued that social identities such as caste, ethnicity, and religion trump over class consciousness during collective action (Chakrabarty, 1988, 1989; Parry, 2020, Sinha, 2014). What this argument essentially does is to reproduce an Orientalist ideology which reduces Indian society to its primordial social identities and ignores the changes brought in by the development of capitalism in India and often converges with populist and nationalist ideology (Brass, 2019; Singh, 2006). Social identity as the dominant form of oppression undermines the importance of class relations that shapes the forms these identities take in capitalism (Das, 2022). Contrary to the dominant view that working class consciousness in India does not have primacy over other non-class-based identities, I argue that during collective action such as strikes and other protest movement by the workers, class consciousness does trump other social identities in India, as it does in numerous other struggles in other parts of the world. Any culturalist reading of collective action and consciousness ignores the conditions of production and reproduction of social life of the working class (Bagchi, 1989) and undermines the interventions made by radical political parties and unions (Issac, 1988; Patel, 1996). The Maruti movement (the strikes and the mobilisations) represented the emergence of a class consciousness among workers despite the presence of non-class-based identities. Moreover, the Maruti workers used their regional identity in the interests of class struggle. In fact, it was not these identities but intra-class hierarchy based on differential employment status that the management used as a strategy to

divide the workers. The failure of this strategy shows that under conditions of exploitation and domination, and the working class does become class conscious and engage in struggles to pursue class interests and not act according to their social identities alone.

Finally, extra-legal struggles by workers serve to act as a process of demystification when workers become aware of the patent partiality of the state towards capital and recognise the antagonism that exists between their material interests and the capitalist interests that law represents. The state plays a crucial role in overcoming barriers to the continued reproduction of capitalism (Clarke, 1991). The instruments that the state uses are not only coercive, but also ideological. Althusser (2006) makes a crucial point that reproduction of capitalism becomes possible through the state ideological apparatuses. One such ideological apparatus is law which along with giving effect to coercive measures also shapes the consciousness of the working class in terms of what is possible and achievable in class struggle. The state intervenes to declare a strike illegal through back-to-work legislation and judicial pronouncements by relying on inadequacies of a legal system that is built to weaken workers' ability to strike. These inventions represent class struggle from above when the state deploys laws to prevent working class struggles and these laws are used alongside open coercive and punitive mechanisms (Smith, 2020). Additionally, these laws are used by the workers and unions to police their own militancy and follow a path of regulating working class struggles within the parameters set by capitalism that Panitch and Swartz (2003) term as a transition from coercion to consent by the capitalist state. Obeying law is the chief obstacle in the path of development of class consciousness as it limits on class struggle both materially and ideologically (Collins, 1982; Hunt, 1976; O' Connel, 2018). Law is used as an instrument of ideological domination consisting of processes which legitimises ruling class domination. Ideological and coercive elements of law interact and reinforce each other. While coercive measures are implemented by the state through use of state power against the working class,

the impact of ideological effect is no less significant. For instance, imprisonment of workers or violence against workers on the picket line is deployed to deter workers from class struggle. For Marx, law is a product of political struggle that occurs on a social and economic terrain shaped by the capitalist mode of production. Operation of law serves class interests; however, it also reflects the existing balance of forces between capital and labour (McLoughlin & Hürzeler, 2021). This political struggle was reflected during the Maruti movement when workers defied conventional trade union struggles in the region by not following what is enshrined in the laws related to contract labour, legal strike, and collective bargaining. Instead, they engaged in what Sundar (2010) calls 'law struggles'- an attempt by workers to redefine the scope and objective of laws to meet their demands. The Maruti workers' struggle involved extra-leal path such as not giving a notice before the strike, demanding parity for the contract workers, defying state prohibitions against sit-in strikes, launching a movement against imprisonment of workers. While the management tried to restrict the class struggle of the workers around what is considered lawful, the workers went against these attempts and contested the very nature of legal struggles followed by trade unions in the region. The extra-legal struggles acted as demystification of a supposedly neutral political-legal order.

This research has two practical implications for working class politics in India by showing the limits of both conventional trade union politics at the national scale and place-based class struggle. In the face of an aggressive neoliberal capitalism that survives on precarity and denying workers the basic right to organise, conventional trade union politics has reached its limits, including its much celebrated general strikes that witness participation of millions of workers. This politics has been unsuccessful in organising workers in newly industrialised landscapes. Although place-based working class politics sometimes achieves a militant character, reformist tendencies set in in the absence of a an ideology and organisation

that challenges the basic foundations of capitalism and the state. These practical-political implications call for a fundamental rethinking of organising working classes in India.

7.4 Further Research

In this dissertation, I have examined how class consciousness impacts class struggle, and in turn, impacted by the effects of class struggle. There are six areas that this dissertation does not explore adequately, and these are important areas of research. First, workers' existence in capitalism is defined by alienation from their products of labour, fellow workers, society, and nature (Marx, 2007; Sayers, 2011; Ollman, 1976). Alienation produces a sense of powerlessness and self-estrangement among workers. Harvey (2014) refers to the alienation of workers as a ''dangerous, if not potentially fatal'' contradiction (p.220, italics in original).[100] He further notes,

> the worker is estranged from his or her product as well as from other workers, from nature and all other aspects of social life …The deprivation and dispossession are experienced and internalized as a sense of loss and sorrow at the frustration of the worker's own creative instincts. Ultimately the worker stops being melancholic and morose and *gets angry at the immediate sources of his or her alienation* (Harvey 2014: 267–268, italics added).

Attributing powerlessness to the immediate source of alienation, i.e., a factory, the work arrangement in a department, or exclusion from union activities, can prevent workers from being aware of the general mechanisms under which these particular alienating practices operate and thus prevent them from becoming class conscious. Ollman (1987, p. 77) points

[100] Harvey (2014) makes a distinction between foundational, moving, and dangerous contradictions. Foundational contradictions refer to those contradiction without which capital simply cannot function. Also, they are constant features of capital in any place and time. The moving contradictions change constantly and their general movement differs over time and space. The dangerous contradictions are characterised by the danger they pose to capital.

out that Marx never made it clear how alienation prevents workers from becoming class conscious and how workers through collective action come out of their (subjective) alienation.[101] This study examined the role of class consciousness in shaping the form of collective action among the Maruti workers in the auto industry. Collective action is premised on solidarity among workers and a shared subjective experience of class position in a workplace. This solidarity and shared experiences are, however, undermined by alienation. Estrangement from fellow workers and the absence of the feelings of solidarity often prevent workers from coming together for collective action. Sawyer and Gampa (2020), on the contrary, argue that the effects of alienation may spur workers towards greater class consciousness by "prompting them to question exploitative class relations behind alienating work conditions "(p. 204). The dynamic between two aspects of alienation (objective and subjective) and its contradictory effects on class consciousness needs to be examined in an empirical context to broaden our understanding of the objective and subjective factors that prevent workers from becoming class conscious.

Second, in the absence of revolutionary movements against capitalism, declining strike movements since the onset of neoliberalism, and the predominance of postmodern tradition which militates against large-scale social transformation, a lot of emphasis has been given in the existing literature to everyday resistance that workers resort to in the workplace (Contu, 2008; Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Paulsen, 2014). Acts of everyday resistance are considered to be the building blocks of class struggle and elementary forms of conscious political activity (Yücesan-Özdemir, 2003). Scott (1985), for instance, terms acts of everyday resistance such as gossiping, lying, foot dragging by farmers against landlords as a manifestation of counter-hegemonic politics and terms these acts as weapons of the weak.

[101] Ollman (1987) notes that alienation operates at two levels: the core of alienation lies in workers' objective situation in capitalism while the subjective alienation is experienced through feelings of powerlessness and isolation (p. 77).

Acts of everyday resistance are common among industrial workers, which take the form of deliberate sabotage, undetected faults, unfulfilled tasks, wearing black bands, and skipping food in the canteen. These acts occur either under conditions in which workers do not find a medium to express their discontent or the existing union or organisation is ineffective in fighting for their rights at the workplace. Moreover, these actions can be carried out by an individual worker as well as a group of workers. In both cases, these actions represent a condition in which large-scale collective action such a strike fail to take place or is deemed ineffective in meeting workers' demands. Historically, covert and overt struggles do not operate in isolation; these forms occur together, alternate and transform themselves into each other (Gutman, 1993). In a critique of the theoretical framework of everyday resistance as weapons of the weak, Brass (2007, 2012) highlights the weakness of these weapons, i.e., limitations of these everyday, quotidian forms of resistance, and small-scale agency and its negative political connotations for class struggle. Brass (2000) further argues that the concept of everyday resistance banishes and downgrades revolutionary transformation from the agenda of working class politics. Instead of treating everyday resistance necessarily as a counter-hegemonic project or a futile exercise, the dialectic between two positions of covert and overt action and its interaction with class consciousness needs to be probed. Class consciousness is not just a subjective position where workers become aware of their class interests objectively, but also manifests itself in class struggle, implying a qualitative and radical upward movement of consciousness. It is imperative to understand the interplay between everyday resistance, which tends to be place-based, and its impact on the emergence of class consciousness among workers.

Third, this dissertation focused on workers' consciousness and struggle in a newly industrialised region in Delhi NCR which never had a history of trade union struggles prior to MSIL strikes in 2000-01. Although the plant-based unions are affiliated with the CTUs, they

chart an independent path when it comes to strikes and collective bargaining. In order to widen the scope of a study on class consciousness in India, a comparative study is needed with other newly industrialised regions dominated by auto clusters (e.g., Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA), Chakan region in Pune, Gujarat, Uttarakhand) and older industrial regions (e.g., Kanpur, Jamshedpur, West Bengal) where unionisation has either vanished or workers have been subdued by capital. A comparative study will shed light on the impact of place-based specificities and the history of working class politics on class consciousness and will also establish general mechanisms which either advance or impede class consciousness at the national scale with wider implications for organising the working class across India.

Fourth, working class politics in contemporary India is operating in the shadow of right-wing Hindutva politics, which works not only against the religious minorities but also against the interests of working class (Hensman, 2017). Hindutva politics, organised carefully by the present government and aided by multiple right-wing organisations, has defined its politics as synonymous with nation, and any opposition to this politics is termed as anti-national. This ideology has had an enormous impact on popular consciousness. Even when the widening inequalities have become a persistent feature in India with worsening material conditions for the working classes, Hindutva politics has become a dominant feature of society through cultural hegemony and political manipulation represented by an authoritarian state and anti-working class policies are promoted in the name of the nation (Gopalakrishnan, 2006; Vanaik, 2017). The far-reaching changes in the labour laws represent this development since 2014 and mark the coming together of neoliberalism and the exclusivist Hindutva ideology (Ghosh, 2020; Patnaik, 2017). Any opposition to these laws has often been termed as anti-national. The emergence of a toxic mixture of religion and politics, with its high point reached through the capture of state power (through electoral means) has enormous consequences for working class consciousness and class struggle. This politics essentially

displaces social inequality represented by class with an elusive notion of unity based on religion. This politics and ideology also seek support from workers through its union, the *Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh* (BMS) [Indian Workers' Organisation] and incorporates them into the collectivity of the Hindu nation (Saxena, 1993; Upadhyay, 2018, 2022). Given the complex ways in which Hindutva ideology interacts with the everyday social life of the working class, and an authoritarian neoliberal state which blunts any resistance against its policies in the name of the nation and national interest, further investigation is needed on the impact of Hindutva politics on working class consciousness.

Fifth, the urban workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar auto cluster use their relationships with their community to support strikes and protests, like what was seen in the Maruti movement. Although the auto workers live in an urban setting, the connection to rural socio-spatial relations still has relevance. The connection between the city and the countryside, combined with the urban workers and rural society, has created political- geographic conditions where workers and rural producers have joined forces for collective action. In the past, rural producers have been involved in working class strikes and demonstrations witnessed during the Maruti movement; however, for the first time, workers made a big contribution to the farmers' movement that was based in Delhi during 2020-21 (Pandey, 2020). Laws related to workers and farmers have become a major cite of class struggle over the years. Drastic changes in these laws against the interest of workers and rural producers have united them in the auto landscape. This unity and solidarity between classes, reflected in moments of resistance against the ruling classes, can create a feeling of collective consciousness across spatial divides and an investigation into this area of research has theoretical and practical implications for revolutionary class struggle in India.

Sixth, the violent incident that occurred at Maruti's Manesar plant had a significant impact on working-class politics in the auto industry in Gurgaon-Manesar. The state used the

incident as a means to suppress the militant working-class movement that had a demonstration effect on workers in other plants in the region. Violent incidents have also occurred in numerous other auto plants across India. These incidents hindered the further development of the struggle in auto clusters and got the workers involved in a tiresome legal process. Although violence is not a necessary precondition for suppressing a working-class movement, it does provide the state with an opportunity to use force to suppress and delegitimise class struggles. Thus, violence raises a fundamental question about the ideological and strategic choices that unions and workers make in the struggle against capital. It is important to examine the extent to which union leadership can raise the workers' consciousness, where political struggle rather than violence is the preferred option in working class movements. This is not just a strategic choice to avoid state repression, but also an ideological question because a class-conscious leadership shapes the consciousness of workers, and does not give in to the "resistance of the oppressed," as Lenin said in *What is to be done?*. Therefore, examining the relation between union leadership and violence can shed important light on a union's ability to shape consciousness of workers away from spectacular events such as strikes and mass demonstration.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

Workers

1. Background Information: age, region (rural or urban) and language, qualification (skilled or unskilled).
2. Since how long you have been working in the present company/how long did you work in the company in question? What is the nature of this employment: permanent/temp/apprentice/causal.
3. Are you the only earning member of your family? How many dependent on you?
4. Where do you live and how do you find the living conditions? Is the rent too high/low/reasonable? Is the landlord friendly/hostile and why? What happens if you are unable to pay the rent on time?
5. Do you borrow money from moneylenders when required? What happens if you cannot pay back on time?
6. How do you go to work? On your own or use transportation provided by the company?
7. How do you find the workplace and the work arrangement? Do supervisors/managers treat you well?
8. Is there a preference for people from a specific region or migrant workers are preferred?
9. What do you think of your union? Does it represent workers' interests? Do union leaders listen to your daily grievances? What about workers' grievances in the areas where they live?
10. The union consists of all the permanent workers. If you are not one of them then what happens to your complaints/grievances? Does the union help you in this regard
11. In case of a strike how do unions mobilise different kinds of workers?
12. When lockout happens how do unions respond to the situation?
13. How is life in living space during conflict at the workplace? Can you sit and discuss about possible action during strikes in your living space? Do you face any threat from landlords?
14. Do union members take decisions only after consulting workers during strikes?

15. Have you participated in any other strikes in the region or in general strikes called by the CTUs?

Company-based Union Leaders

1. How do you see trade union politics in the auto-industry?
2. To what extent unions are able to put pressure on the company management for gains, both economic and political?
3. How do you organise workers? On the shop floor/neighbourhood/any other meeting place?
4. Do you take the help of outside unions in other companies in terms of consultations? Do you consult central labour federations before strikes? How responsive they are? If no, why?
5. What difficulties do you face in organising workers?
6. Why the demand for an independent union has become such a big issue in recent times?
7. Do you look after the interests of contract workers? If yes, how and if not, why?

Leaders of Central Trade Unions

1. What do you think of the recent strikes in the auto-industry? Why is there discontent and anger among workers?
2. Is it about wages or/and something else, in your opinion?
3. How effective is your organisation in this industrial area? Do you help the plant-based unions during strikes and lockouts? And how?
4. Does your union's intervention help?
5. Do you see any change in the relationship between the government and the unions after economic reforms, especially in the context of foreign companies?
6. Do auto workers and other industrial workers participate in the general strikes?
7. Where do you see the limitation/weakness of your unions in reaching out to workers?

Labour Department Officials

1. What do you think of the increase in recent strikes?
2. How often do workers/unions approach your office?
3. What is the official mandate in this regard?
4. How do you mediate between the company and workers?
5. When there is a conflict between employers and employees, what role do you play?

Appendix 2

Maruti Movement: A Timeline

2007: Manesar car plant started production

2009-10: Conversations begin on forming an independent union (separate from the union based in the Gurgaon plant)

2011, May: Workers at the Manesar plant apply for registration of a union named Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU)

4 June: First 13-day wildcat strike and occupation of the plant

16 June: The strike was called off.

4 August: Registration of MSEU denied again by the Registrar of Trade Unions, Chandigarh

29 August: Good Conduct Undertaking (GCU) imposed on workers; workers are locked out for refusing to sign the Undertaking.

30 September: Return to work after the workers signed the Undertaking; Workers asked to join work on 3 October.

3 October: Contract workers not allowed to enter the factory premises.

7 October: Workers begin the second strike in solidarity with contract workers.

21 October: 30 workers including 13 leaders of the MSEU including the President, Sonu Gujjar and General Secretary, Shiv Kumar were forced to resign.

2012: With a new name, Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) registered on 1 March.

18 April: MSWU submits its first Charter of Demands

18 July: General Manager (HR), Awanish Dev dies during violence that broke out in the plant.

2,300 workers including more than 500 permanent workers are terminated from the company. 148 workers are arrested for their alleged involvement in the violence.

Nov-Dec 2012: Provisional Working Committee (PWC) was formed consisting of the retrenched workers. The PWC spearheaded the workers' struggle after the violent incident at the plant.

5 February, 2013: All India day of solidarity action organised by the PWC and supported by CTUs and independent unions and civil society organisations.

19 May, 2013: Huge protests in Kaithal, Haryana in front of the house of the provincial Industries Minister

18 July, 2013: Hunger strike by imprisoned workers in Bhondsi Central Jail, Haryana

15 January, 2014: *Jan Jagran Yatra* (Public awareness programme) began from Kaitha and reached Jantar Mantar, Delhi on 31 January.

April, 2014: Elections were held for a new union

June, 2014: Formation of Workers' Solidarity Center (WSC)

July-August 2014: Formation of *Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh* (MSMS)

September 26, 2015: Company Trainees (CTs) protested against the raw deal meted out to them in the settlement reached between the union and the management.

27 February, 2015: First Mazdoor Nyay Convention (Justice for Workers Convention), Delhi

26 November, 2015: Second Mazdoor Nyay Convention, Delhi

March 10, 2017: The Gurgaon Sessions Court acquitted 117 workers and convicted 31 workers including the union members and sentenced them to life imprisonment.