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Sudhir Kakar

Authority Patterns and Subordinate Behavior in Indian Organizations

This paper reviews the literature on authority patterns in Indian organizations in a comparative framework. These patterns are found to be dominated by the parental ideology of authority relations. On the basis of an empirical study, the paper suggests that this ideology, though legitimized by social-cultural factors, may be dysfunctional in having a negative effect on subordinate performance and satisfaction. The results of the empirical study suggest the hypothesis that the effect of social-cultural factors on organizational behavior is better understood through the concept of psychosocial identity, in which the effect of occupational identity is an extremely important factor, rather than through the concept of national character with its implications of cultural relativism in work behavior.

To bring a semblance of order among the many definitions of authority found in the literature, Peabody (1968) has suggested that they be classified as to whether authority is seen as (1) property of a person or office, especially the right to issue orders (2) a relationship between two offices, one superior and the other subordinate, such that both incumbents perceive the relationship as legitimate, or (3) the quality of a communication by virtue of which it is accepted. In this paper authority is a relationship between two individuals, one the superior and the other the subordinate, the relationship lying not in the individuals but in the positions they occupy in the formal hierarchy of the work organization.[1] Despite some semantic clumsiness the terms authority and authority relations are used interchangeably in this study.

INTRODUCTION

Authority Patterns

Consistent with this definition, which emphasizes the interpersonal, dynamic as-

pect of authority relationships, the interaction patterns of superiors and subordinates can be usefully divided into parental, professional, or fraternal relationships. The parental category can be further subdivided according to the dominance of either the parternal assertive or that of the maternal nurturant modes in the behavior of the superior (Hodgson et al., 1965).

These categories, which are ideal constructions only and rarely found in their pure stages, differ from each other along the two basic dimensions of superior behavior—the emotional affiliation exhibited toward the subordinate as a person and the nature of control exercised over his task performance. Whereas the term, affiliation, similar to the consideration dimension of the Ohio leadership studies (Fleishman et al., 1955) and employee orientation of the Michigan studies (Kahn and Katz, 1960), emphasizes such factors as the superior's rapport with his subordinates, his emotional support, and consideration of the subordinate's feelings, high control reflects closeness of supervision, lack of delegation, and subordinate participation in planning and decision making. The basic authority patterns can be distinguished as shown in Table 1.

It should be noted that consistent with the definition of authority given, the classification in Table 1 concentrates on the effect of the superior on the subordinate rather than

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TABLE 1. AUTHORITY IDEOLOGIES AND TYPES OF SUPERIORS

| Ideology | Image of superior | Behavior of superior toward subordinate | |
		Emotional affiliation	Task control
Parental	Nurturant	High	High
	Assertive	Low	High
Professional	Impersonal	Low	Low
Fraternal	Helping	High	Low

on the influence of certain organizational imperatives on subordinate behavior. Thus in organizations with impersonal, bureaucratic type of authority relations, though the subordinate's task performance is highly controlled, this control is not exercised by the superior as a person but is a part of the organizational planning, which has been translated into clearly defined methods and procedures of work.

The professional and fraternal authority patterns, the so-called managerial ideologies (Bendix, 1956), have been analyzed in detail before (Bennis, 1959; Peabody, 1964). The parental form of authority relations is the most characteristic of Indian organizations, and thus needs to be discussed in more detail.

Parental Authority Relations

These types, which have also been termed as authoritarian or paternalistic, depending upon whether the emphasis is on the paternal assertive or the maternal nurturant modes respectively, are roughly comparable in a number of different societies, showing a great deal of similarity across geographical and cultural boundaries. The main characteristics of organizations with parental authority relations have been summarized by Bennett and Ishino (1963: 225) as follows:

1. There is a degree of hierarchy which is greater than the minimal amount that any employer-employee relationship should display. That is, the status difference between employer and employee is not purely a matter of instrumental necessity but contains a cultural or ideological element which suggests that the employer is more than just an employer; he is a superior person in control because of his superiority.
2. The concern of the employer for aspects of lives of his employees which have nothing to do with the actual work performed. That is, he is responsible in some way for his workers and in most cases their families.

The main features of paternal authority relations is the carry-over of preindustrial elements into modern work organizations, the transformation of a society's historical legacy of authority in other areas of social relations, especially the parent-child relationship, into an ideal of superior-subordinate relations in work organizations. A good example of the persistence and pervasiveness of this ideal can be seen in Japanese organizations with the *Keiei-Kazoku-shugi*, management-familyism, management system (Takezawa, 1965), in which the superior is expected to act in the role of a parent benevolently guiding the subordinate, who on the other hand is expected to reciprocate with complete obedience and absolute loyalty. This system has been shown by many authors (Takezawa, 1965; Yoshino, 1968) to have its roots in the *ie* concept of Japanese family system and the *bushido* code of ethics, which defined the master-servant relationship in traditional Japan. Similarly, examples of traditional authority patterns in the family or the tribe being transformed into models of superior-subordinate relationships in work organizations have been shown to occur in Turkey (Bradburn, 1963), Ghana (Magnus-George, 1965), and Thailand (Rochanapurananda, 1965).

Authority Patterns in Indian Organizations

The available evidence on superior-subordinate relations indicates that the parental type in general and the assertive superior in particular, dominate authority relations in Indian organizations. Myers (1960: 166), from his interviews with government officials, labor leaders, and managers in both Indian and foreign-owned firms, stated that despite some exceptional companies, "many Indian top managements are relatively authoritarian in their relationships with lower management and with labor." Along with cases of paternalism, that is, nurturance, this element of assertiveness in superior behavior is not only a characteristic of top management but is also a feature of authority relations at all levels in an organization. Most empirical studies, though they

have been equivocal on the affiliation aspect of superior behavior, clearly demonstrate the existence of a high degree of task control. Thus in a study of leadership behavior in a state-owned engineering factory (Ganguli, 1964), the prevailing pattern ranged midway between the bureaucratic and the autocratic, that is, between the impersonal and the assertive superior.

In a recent survey (Punekar and Savur, 1969) of the relations between white-collar employees and their supervisors in 11 different organizations, such as banks, insurance companies, manufacturing firms, government offices, a state-owned public utility company, and an educational institution, many superiors were convinced that subordinates could not participate in policy making as they had no acquaintance with management problems. Only 3 superiors, out of a sample of 75, believed that subordinates could work without supervision; 70 percent believed that subordinates could only work with supervision and had no sense of responsibility; and only 6 thought that giving responsibility to the white-collar employees was the best way to get the work done.

In a recent study of authority in social relations in India, readers used for teaching Hindi and English in Indian schools were collected from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan and their contents analyzed (Kakar, 1971). In Kakar's (1971) study, 31 stories depicting authority situations were analyzed according to the following scheme: type of authority relationship depicted, main source of superior's authority, supporting source, image of superior, the means used to enforce the superior's wishes, the subordinate's conflicts in obedience, the degree of this conflict, and subordinate behavior.

In 64 percent of cases, the superior's right to command derived from traditional-moral factors, although these were strongly supported by his charismatic personality. In all cases the image of the superior was either nurturant or assertive, never impersonal or fraternal. The ideal superior behavior, which made the subordinate anticipate the superior's wishes or accept them without conscious questioning, was a nurturant one. This kind of superior obtained compliance by providing emotional rewards or by arousing guilt. Influencing the behavior of subordinates by physical or emotional punishment, such as rejection and shaming by the assertive superior, was more likely to lead to open defiance or the evasion of the superior's orders.

Although both assertive and nurturant superiors exist in other areas of social relations in India, it is the nurturant superior who is held to be the most effective one. Similarly, although both the joint family and the *yajamani* system of the caste organization include authoritarian elements, the nurturance inherent in them is of equal importance. The dominance of the assertive superior in Indian organizations, it is being suggested here, may lie in the historical development of modern work organizations in India.

Historical Background of Indian Work Organizations

Although corporate organizations of the guild type were known in ancient India and persisted well into the Mughal period, there is no direct link or influence of these institutions on modern work organizations, which owe their origin, form, and inspiration wholly to the period of British rule in India. The growth of modern organizations was well under way around the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century and owed its momentum mainly to European initiative and especially the pioneering role played by the military and civil servants of the East India Company (Rungta, 1970). The organization structures, administrative procedures, and work methods in these companies were faithful copies of the original British models. Although in the latter half of the nineteenth century the number of Indian-owned companies increased rapidly, especially in certain sectors such as cotton textiles, the character of all such organizations was influenced by the British models, not in the least because for a long time the managerial and policy-making levels remained the preserve of the Britishers. As late as 1895, 42.4 percent of the managers and mechanical engineers in the Bombay cotton mills were European,

although only 6 out of 70 mills were under European managing agencies (Rungta, 1970: 50).

However, although the administrative practices and methods of Indian organizations were in general modeled after the British pattern, the authority relation was not merely one of superiors and subordinates, but of British superiors and Indian subordinates. Whether the authoritarianism of the British managers and civil servants was due to the prevalence and widespread acceptance of social Darwinism in the West, the fact remains that the authoritarian elements in their relations with their Indian subordinates were greatly exaggerated by the social-psychological exigencies of the colonial situation. Most Britishers, whatever their convictions about authority relations at home, showed a high degree of authoritarianism (Misra, 1970) in their behavior toward the Indian subordinate, whether he was the despised clerk, the *babu*, or the illiterate worker, since the human nature generally attributed to the Indian subordinate was of a man who was "half devil and half child" (Kipling, 1920: 371).

The persistence of these beliefs until recently can be seen in the following remarks of a manager in an English firm (Myers, 1960: 169): "Ten years ago when I was first coming out to India, an old India hand got me aside and told me, 'Now just forget about these ideas of leadership you have been learning here in Britain. Out there if the workers don't follow instructions, belt them. That will bring them around.'" The hypothesis advanced here is that this model of superior behavior—emotional aloofness combined with high control of subordinates—has persisted in Indian work organizations. It has become the ideal of managerial behavior in which Indians in supervisory positions, through a constant process of identification, have not only imitated the outer aspects of this model, such as the formal modes of dress and speech, but have also adopted its assertive attitudes in behavior relating to authority situations. It is being suggested that although the existence of the parental ideology of authority may be related to the indigenous social-cultural factors in the Indian

tradition, the dominance of the assertive superior can be best explained by a consideration of the historical background of Indian work organizations.

Behavior of Subordinates in Parental Authority Pattern

The dominance of parental authority patterns in Indian organizations stressing a high degree of control does not, however, provide any indication of their being functional, that is, whether the existence of assertive and nurturant superiors is also a proof of their necessity, in the sense of increasing subordinate performance and work satisfaction. The few empirical studies of subordinate behavior in Indian organizations (Chowdhry, 1953; Bose, 1965) have generally followed the simplified design of the early Michigan studies (Katz *et al.*, 1950; 1951) in which employee-orientation and production-orientation were held to be the opposing ends of a single continuum rather than being treated as independent dimensions of superior behavior. The findings of these studies are thus limited to the affiliation aspect only, and have supported the results of many American studies, that is, the positive relationship between high affiliation of the superior with the subordinates' satisfaction and productivity.

On the other hand, although the extremely limited number of studies on the effect of high degree of task control on subordinate behavior precludes any generalizations, there is some evidence outside the setting of an industrial organization—for example, in an experimental study on productivity and satisfaction of Hindu boys (Meade, 1967) and morale of farmers in a community development organization (van den Ban and Thorat, 1968)—that contrary to the general American pattern, a highly controlling superior has a positive effect on subordinate performance and satisfaction. The objective of the study reported in this paper was to test further the hypothesis that the prevalence of assertive and nurturant superiors—as measured by the emotional affiliation exhibited toward the subordinates and degree of task-control exercised—in Indian organizations may be functional, in the sense of increasing subordinate perfor-

mance and satisfaction. Since the objective of the study was to serve as a preliminary enquiry into the functionality of authority patterns in Indian organizations, the research design adopted was a simplified one. It omitted certain methodological refinements, such as the differentiation of superior behavior into more than the two basic dimensions of affiliation and control and made an assumption of a functional dependency between superior style and subordinate behavior, although it is realized that superior style is only one among many other factors influencing the organizational behavior of subordinates.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Setting

The study was carried out in the general workshop of a large engineering concern in western India, essentially a jobbing shop, which manufactured technological equipment to the individual customer's requirements and specifications and employed a total work force of 1500 men. The superiors and subordinates were selected on the following criteria: (1) to minimize the influence of work role or situational variables such as task, salary, promotional opportunities, and so on, where subordinates did not work in work groups and reported singly to their immediate superiors, so as to minimize the influence of group norms and relationships on work behavior; and (2) to minimize the influence of such structural properties as organizational levels, organization size and shape, subunit size, line-staff hierarchies, and so on. In practice these criteria were on the whole met by selecting the sample of 29 subordinates from the first-level supervisors, designated as assistant foremen in the organizational hierarchy, and the sample of their 11 superiors from the second-level supervisors, the foremen, from the general workshop of the single organization.

Measurement

The subordinate work satisfaction was measured by administration of the job description index (Smith et al., 1969), while the work performance of each subordinate was rated on an 11-point scale by the production manager of the workshop. The reliability of these performance ratings was checked by asking each superior to rate his own subordinates on the same scale. The Spearman rank-order correlation between the two sets of ratings of subordinate performance was .738.

The emotional affiliation of the superiors was measured by a 12-item questionnaire with such items as "I take special pains not to hurt the feelings of my subordinates," and "I usually keep myself somewhat inaccessible to my subordinates," with six categories of responses for each item ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The split-half reliability after correction was .838. An attempt, though not a very demanding one, at some degree of convergent validity was made by comparing the superiors' scores with their scores on the consideration scale of the Ohio leadership opinion questionnaire (Fleishman et al., 1955) with a correlation of .575 ($p < .01$).

Task control was measured by a questionnaire consisting of 10 items, such as "I prefer to give my subordinates general guidelines rather than detailed instructions for the work I assign them," and "I think I can get the best results by supervising the work of my subordinates fairly closely," again with six categories of responses provided. The split-half reliability of the scale was .863. Each superior was also rated independently by two psychologists on the task-control dimension in the course of case discussions involving three superiors at a time. The correlation between the superiors' rankings on the task-control scale and their mean rankings by the raters on case discussion was .900.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In view of the cultural and historical patterns of authority in India described earlier, it was expected that high affiliation of the superior and, more importantly, a high degree of control exercised over task performance would tend to have a positive relationship with subordinate performance and satisfaction in work. The findings of the study did not support these expectations. Although affiliation was found to be signifi-

cantly related to subordinate work satisfaction (Pearson $r = .463$, $p < .01$) and performance (Spearman $r = .506$, $p < .01$), the degree of task control exercised by the superior had a significant negative relationship both with satisfaction (Pearson $r = -.491$, $p < .01$) and performance (Spearman $r = -.525$, $p < .01$). Moreover, among the varying combinations of affiliation and control that go into the building of a superior typology, it is neither the assertive nor the nurturant superior of the existing parental ideologies of authority in Indian organizations, but the helping superior of the fraternal ideology, who was found to be most positively related to the work performance and satisfaction of subordinates, as shown in Table 2. The *t*-values for differ-

TABLE 2. INFLUENCE OF TYPE OF SUPERIOR ON SUBORDINATES

| | | Subordinates | |
| | | Mean satis-faction score | Median perfor-mance rating |
Type of superior	N		
Assertive			
Low affiliation, high control	5	140.00	5
Nurturant			
High affiliation, high control	9	148.33	5
Fraternal			
High affiliation, low control	12	159.00	7

ences in satisfaction between assertive and fraternal, and nurturant and fraternal were in the predicted direction, but not statistically significant at $p < .05$. The Mann-Whitney U for difference in performance between assertive and fraternal was significant at $p < .01$, and between nurturant and fraternal was significant at $p < .05$. These findings are very similar to those reported in many American studies (Vroom, 1964) and indicate that the mere Indianness of the superior and subordinate samples is by itself not a sufficient criterion to predict subordinate behavior in a specific study.

The expectation that the Indianness of the setting might show subordinate behavior different from that found in comparable

studies in the West is based on the cultural-anthropological approach, with the general principle that basic values of cultural pattern are reflected in all areas of social interaction, and that to some extent, behavior in work organizations is determined by the norms and values of the outside culture to which the individuals belong. In India, these norms and values emphasized the likelihood of a highly controlling superior having a positive influence on subordinate work behavior; yet, the findings show a wide discrepancy between the expected and the actual.

The link between individual behavior in organizations and the wider culture is generally thought to be provided through the concept of national character (Inkeles and Levinson, 1954; Mead, 1951), which implies that individuals in a culture grow to adulthood with certain common capacities and incapacities for organizational behavior and a shared approach to social interaction, which is different from that found in other cultures. On the personality side, the concept of national character is included in such terms as basic personality or modal personality, which adds to the essentially valid statement, "A man brings to his work attitudes and modes of behavior which have evolved from his life experience," the clause that these attitudes and modes of behavior have a strong common element in any given culture (Levinson, 1968: 17–19).

In the concept of national character, basic attitudes toward authority and common expectations as to what constitutes ideal superior and subordinate behavior are presumed to exist, which are the outcome of typical early childhood experiences with authority figures in the family system characteristic of the culture. Thus in India, the expectation that a highly controlling superior has a positive effect on subordinate work satisfaction is mainly based on the presumed existence of a basic or modal Hindu personality in which personal initiative is replaced by obedience and conformity, and in which security for the individual is associated with dependence upon superiors (Taylor, 1948; Asthana, 1956; Carstairs, 1958).

The pitfall in the application of the

concepts of national character and basic personality seem to lie in the assumption of a typical childhood, not only in small primitive cultures but also in large, complex societies. It seems likely that in India, with its great variety of regional, linguistic, caste, class, and religious differentiations, there are many national characters, rather than a modal personality. Furthermore, even if it is assumed that in complex societies with their wide range of social differentiation, the family type and early childhood experiences with authority are relatively uniform, the concept of national character tends to ignore the influence of other social relationships outside the period of early childhood which individuals enter into throughout their latency and adolescence periods and which are highly differentiated along the social class, caste, and rural-urban dimensions.

It is suggested here that the link between the wider culture and behavior in organizations may be more appropriately through the concept of psychosocial identity (Erikson, 1968), which has its core both in the individual and in his communal culture. Although the concept of identity has aspects which are developmental, historical, psychological, and social, it is only its social aspect, the individual's sense of solidarity with a group's ideals, that would be of primary interest here. Individual behavior in organizations is influenced by the ideals of those communities which are significant for an individual's sense of identity. These communities may exist both within and outside the organization and may have norms and values which are mutually supportive or mutually conflicting. In a concrete case, one of the problems faced by researchers into organizational behavior would lie in the identification of those communities which are salient for the individual's present reality. Thus, whereas for farmers in a community-development organization in an Indian village, behavior in authority relationships may be partly explained by reference to the ideals of such outside communities as caste and extended family, reference to these communities may be misplaced in the case of industrial workers in an urban center. Thus, in a series of studies on the industrial worker in India,

Sharma (1968, 1969, 1970) showed that in general, such elements of behavior as satisfaction, commitment, absenteeism, and union participation are not related to caste, religion, or rural-urban factors but primarily to the occupational status within the factory; that is, the differentiation and membership of the workers in the communities of machinists, assemblers, or craftsmen. Furthermore, outside the organization there is some relationship between work satisfaction and the extent to which a worker feels himself to be a member of the working class, the broader community outside the organization. These findings seem to support Erikson's (1968: 127) observations that "the majority of men have always consolidated their identity needs around their technical and occupational capacities."

Thus, in explaining organizational behavior in social terms, the primary task becomes the identification of salient groups, both within and outside the organization, through which most individuals derive a sense of identity. In industrial work these groups seem to be primarily the communities of technical skills. In the subordinate sample of the present study, it was then the community of first-level supervisors and the professional community of engineers in India outside the organization whose ideal of authority relationships were relevant for a discussion of the findings.

Engineers would then be expected to differ from nonengineers in their reactions to the styles of superiors, in ways which would be related to the ideals and attitudes toward authority of the engineering community in India. Specifically, it would be expected that the satisfaction and performance of engineers would be lower than that of nonengineers under conditions of high control. This is borne out by the following data. For the 19 engineers, Pearson r was $-.312$ between task control and satisfaction, and Spearman r was $-.550$, $p < .05$; whereas for the 10 nonengineers, the Pearson r was $+.103$, and the Spearman r, $+.05$. The difference in satisfaction, that is t-test, between engineers and nonengineers, keeping high control constant, was significant at $p < .10$, and difference in performance, that is, the Mann-Whitney U-test, was significant at $p < .05$. The question

then arises as to the source of occupational values relating to authority of engineers in India opposing the exercise of a high degree of control over task performance by superiors.

In Rosenberg's (1957) study of 18 occupations in the U.S., engineers were found to have one of the lowest scores on people-oriented values. They tended to emphasize independence in work and freedom from supervision, and were not greatly concerned with being liked, helpful, or anxious to please, characteristics which were significantly more related to individuals in such professions as social work, medicine, or teaching. The need for autonomy is apparently also characteristic of engineers in India (Sinha and Misra, 1961).

This need for a relative freedom from supervision may of course be related to the personality pattern, high need for autonomy, of those individuals who choose engineering as a profession. It may also, however, be related to the process of historical change which often brings profound changes in the self-images of various groups in a society, and which may have brought the elements of autonomy of task and freedom from control by superiors in the forefront of the Indian engineers' professional identity. This, of course, is conjectural since only a historical inquiry into the self-image of engineers can show whether such a change has in fact occurred in India. However, it is known that changes in the self-image of the engineering profession occurred in an analogous period of American history, the period of rapid industrialization between 1865 and 1910. Horowitz (1966) showed that in this period, American engineers became increasingly concerned with their status with respect to other occupational groups. Increasingly, they began to see members of their profession as the critical actors in the process of industrialization who had provided the underpinnings of economic growth—transportation grids and communication systems—for which the nation was indebted to them. Their self-image was that of men who made things work, avoided waste of time, capital, and labor, and were independent in thought and action. In view of the ongoing industrialization in India, a similar process may be taking place in the professional identity of engineers. In a generalized and much more speculative form, the hypothesis can be advanced that when an occupational group sees itself, and is seen by others, as playing the critical role in the achievement of broader societal goals, it tends to demand the kind of authority relationships in which its members have the maximum freedom from control in their task performance. Perhaps this hypothesis can also be extended to include the organizational setting, where it would state that the expectations of members belonging to critical functional area in the achievement of the organization's objectives are of a quite different order from those of others seen as performing less critical roles.

CONCLUSION

From the review of literature dealing with authority patterns and authority ideologies, it would seem that the dominance of the parental ideology in Indian organizations, especially in the form of assertive superior behavior, is related to social-cultural factors in the Indian tradition as well as to the historical development of modern work organizations in India. The existence of these patterns, legitimized by social-cultural factors, is however, neither sufficient proof of their being functional nor useful in the prediction of actual behavior in a modern work organization.

The findings of the empirical study suggest that the concepts of national character and modal personality, with their implication of cultural relativism, are likely to be of little value in explaining the influence of social-cultural factors on subordinate work behavior. Such an explanation is better provided through a consideration of the ideals of the communities, essentially occupational, both inside and outside the organization, from which most members derive their sense of identity. Moreover, this investigation needs to be supplemented by a study of the historical development and the influence of historical change on the ideals and attitudes relating to authority.

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