

CHAPTER 4: MEMBERSHIP OF TRADE UNION

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Trade Union Membership: In 1943, 'Girani Kamagar Samiti' was established for the textile workers in Ichalkaranji. Prior to independence, only four workers had joined the union. It indicates that in the initial period, the workers were not interested in joining the union. In 1948, Girani Kamgar Samiti changed its name and was known as 'The Ichalkaranji Girani Kamagar Samiti'. This Samiti was affiliated to the INTUC.

Table

Membership of workers and year of membership

Textile Industry	Year of membership			Total
—————→	1966	1967-82	1983	
	12 (22%)	44 (78%)	47 (84%)	56

With the help of the above table it can be seen that the majority of the workers have joined the union after 1967, as compared to only 22% who had joined the union before 1967. From 1967, the situation got changed and most of the workers joined the unions. The textile workers were really the pioneers of the trade unions. In due course various other industries established their unions. Hence the textile workers' union was the oldest union compared with the unions of other industries.

Various Purposes of Joining Union

The workers wish to achieve certain goals with the help of

the unions. So they join the union. There are certain approaches for joining the unions. Some scholars had attempted these approaches. For this purpose, it is essential to review these approaches. Mainly we come across the three approaches as follows:

A) Economic Approach: This approach includes the purposes like securing of higher wages, bonus and making provision for welfare activities by the trade union. About this approach Morris S. Viteles states, "It is clearly apparent that economic needs - expressed in the desire for higher wages, job security and fringe benefits - play a highly significant role in leading workers to join unions."¹

This approach again we can clear with the help of the views of A.M. Rose. He writes, "Personal benefits, good cause and higher wages were the most frequently mentioned reasons for union membership."² The above views of two scholars indicate that for solving the economic reasons the workers wish to join the union.

B) Political Approach: With the help of union the workers want to establish the workers' dictatorship. Karl Marx explained this idea in his "Communist Manifesto" which was published in 1848. It gives an effective weapon to the workers to fight against the capitalism.

The Manifesto contains the slogan which later on became the battlecry everywhere, namely, "Working men of all countries unite.

You have nothing to lose but your chains and a world to gain."

It gave a logical presentation of the ideas that had been working in socialist and revolutionary circles. It stressed the class war aspect of the conflict between capital and labour. The success of the programme was made to depend on the acquisition of political powers by workers in individual countries as well as on international labour action. One of the leading Unions in Ichalkaranji, CTTU has followed the same path.

C) The Socio-Psychological Approach: This approach has been very correctly explained by Golden and Ruttenberg. They write, "Workers organise into labour unions not alone for economic motives but also for equally compelling psychological and social ones, so that they can participate in making the decisions that vitally affect them in their work and community life."³

Further, K.N. Vaid writes that the trade union is, "the only social institution that provides within itself the mechanism whereby workers can secure the respect of other people, creative comforts and economic security, independence and control over their own affairs and understanding of the forces at work in the world and integrity. If a worker believes that the union can help him in these ways, he is likely to join it."⁴

The economic purpose was the main reason for joining the trade unions by the workers. Because the workers wanted to get

higher wages, fringe benefits, bonus and welfare activities with the help of the trade union. After the economic purpose, the workers desired to join for the unity and strength. Further, they were having the opportunities of getting leadership of their union. But most of the workers in Ichalkaranji were not interested in the leadership of the union.

Why Some Workers Were Not Desirous to Join the Union

As we have taken the interview of 56 workers in textile industry, 10 out of 56 were not the members of the union. So, it is necessary to take review of the negative approach of the workers about the union. The workers explained certain causes as to why they had not joined the union.

- (1) The first and foremost cause was that the majority of the workers who had not joined the union, were very well aware that union at this unit was not functioning properly. Because sometimes communalism and casteism were playing the important role.
- (2) In Ichalkaranji, we could not find the principle, "one union in one industry". There are three unions in the textile industry. So, the workers are puzzled and are unable to decide as to which union they should join. Multiplicity of unions in the same establishment leads to inter-union rivalries which ultimately cut at the root of the movement. It weakens the power for collective bargaining and reduces the effectiveness of workers in securing

their legitimate rights.

(3) Some workers explained that the unions are related to the political parties. So, they had not joined the union. Today, to a large extent, trade union leadership is in the hands of politicians. The existence of various political parties having an immediate interest in the working class, at times, for purely political purposes, it has resulted in the absence of genuine trade union leadership. It is time that workers realised that party politics is completely out of place in trade unions and that they should not play the role of pawns in the game of party and last with their interest and welfare. Trade union leaders and party leaders should also take active steps to ensure that workers should also take active steps to ensure that workers are weaned away from disruptive political leanings.

(4) Some workers were under pressure because of their economic condition. The workers' wages are low, hours of work are still long in textile industry at Ichalkaranji. Housing conditions are primitive and facilities for education, recreation and welfare very meagre. Due to economic backwardness, the workers did not dare to join the union. Further, the government should assure the workers of freedom of association, and their working conditions should be such as would ensure protection against the economic consequences at old age, sickness and employment, for education, good housing, shorter working hours, health safety and all other

necessities for decent living should also be ensured to them.

(5) Today, the trade union had failed to solve the problems of workers, so they were reluctant to join the union. Because of political rivalries, which often come in the way of settlement of disputes, lack of resources, disunity among the rulers, the workers do not desire to join the union in some cases.

(6) Some times public opinion was against the activities of the trade union. Now-a-days, the leaders of the union did not know how to secure public sympathy for their demands. Frequently they followed the extreme ways. So, the public opinion did not support them. For this reason, some workers had not joined the union.

The Workers' Active Role in Union Activities

In Ichalkaranji, the textile workers in some units are having keen interest in the union activities. So, in this study an attempt is also made to know the keen interest being shown in actual active role in union works. By active role we mean the participation of workers in the meetings of the union and also the day-to-day activities of the union.

The workers had some problems in the factories. They wanted to solve these problems with the help of the union. For this purpose the union used to arrange the meetings. Naturally, the

workers should attend such meetings. Every year, the union leaders used to arrange two or more union meetings. But the attendance of the workers for the meetings indicated that 60% workers only attended the meetings. However, the annual meeting of the union was attended by most of the workers. The important reason was that in the last meeting (annual meeting) some economic problems were discussed, such as bonus etc.

According to Tannebaum and Khan, there are certain indicators of participation in union activities. Some important indicators are as follows:

- "i) number of regular union meetings attended,
- ii) number of special meetings attended,
- iii) number of things done at these meetings,
- iv) holding union office,
- v) membership of union committees, and
- vi) voting behaviour during the last union election for officers."⁵

The active participation of the workers in union is definitely helpful for the union democracy. This view is explained very strongly by K. Devaki Devi, "in the trade unions, the people are the union members. Since the people's participation is a measure of real democracy, the extent of membership participation in the day-to-day functioning of trade unions constitutes a

critical measure of real union democracy.

Some More Characteristics of the Workers for the Union Participation

The age of worker was also one of the important aspects for the union. The workers of 28 to 38 years of age had high participation compared to those in 18 to 28 years. Further, the upper age groups 38 and above had less participation in the union. It seems that in the age group of 18-28, the workers were appointed in the factory. They were interested in the union work. They used to attend the meetings and also participated in the functions of the meeting. As they were quite young, and not having much experience of union administration, they took keen interest in the activities of the union.

But the workers in the age group of 28-38 years had high participation, the reason being that they had experience in the union administration. So, they lead the union as the office bearers.

The Skilled Worker and Union

The skilled workers were interested in the union affairs, because they were senior members in the union. Further, these workers were having better educational level and good salaries as compared to the semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Other two types

of workers were also the union members, but their role was of a passive member.

The textile workers in Ichalkaranji were having agricultural and non-agricultural background. Those who had the agricultural background, were not much interested in the union activities. But the workers of non-agricultural background were having greater proportion in the union works. In short, the workers who were coming from agricultural background were having less interest in union activities. On the other hand, the workers who had no agricultural background were interested in the union activities.

Some Causes for not Participating in Union Activities

For our study purpose, we have considered 56 workers, out of whom 10 had never participated in union activities. These ten workers gave the following reasons for not participating in the Union activities:

- (1) Some of the workers used to come for the work from the neighbouring villages. Hence they could not get enough time to participate in the union activities.
- (2) Though, in general, the textile workers were having low level of education, those workers who did not participate in the union activities, were totally illiterate. Due to the pressure of illiteracy they had not dared to attend

the meetings of the union.

- (3) As we have stated above, some of the workers were having agricultural background and as such, after their scheduled work, they had to work in their farms or at least to supervise their farm. So, it was difficult for them to spare the time for the union work.

These causes indicate that the workers did not participate in union activities because of their personal and domestic problems.

Complaints about the Union Work

Though more than 80% workers were the members of the union, they had raised some complaints about the union work.

- (1) Some of the workers explained that the union does not work for the betterment of the workers. They are facing so many problems, but it cannot solve the problems of workers properly.

- (2) A few workers had complaints about inefficient union office bearers. Again the union meetings were not being held frequently. According to them, with the help of one or two meetings the problems cannot be discussed properly. Hence, it is essential to have a meeting every month.

(3) The workers joined the union to secure higher wages, fringe benefits, bonus and welfare activities. But some workers were having some other motives; for example, political or social. Sometimes the union did not notice these later points. So, the workers complained about the negligence of other problems by the union. Naturally, they were not interested in union activities.

Recognition of Trade Unions

The problem of recognition of trade unions has been a long-debated question. As early as 1931, the Royal Commission on Labour stated that recognition of a trade union "may mean much or may mean nothing" and insisted that "the fact that unions consist of only a minority of employees, is no adequate reason for withholding recognition. Similarly, the existence of two or more rival unions is not in itself a sufficient ground for refusing to recognize any or all of them. The uniting of all employees with common interests in a single union is eminently desirable in their own interests, but this is a matter for them and not for the employers".⁶ Very often, employers refuse recognition on the plea that the unions do not enjoy the support of the majority of workers. This results in inter-union rivalries and malpractices to raise their membership and to win over the workers from one union to another. This can be considered as one of the major reasons for passiveness of the working class.

The Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, provided for the registration of trade unions, but did not include any legislation for their recognition by the employer. The Bombay Industrial Disputes Act, 1938 provided measures for the recognition of unions by employers which commanded a membership of 25 per cent of the total number of workers employed in an occupation or industry. The Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946 further classified trade unions into three broad categories, namely, representative unions, qualified unions and primary unions. The Act provided for the creation of a new class of approved unions which are invested with substantial privileges in return for their undertakings, a set of corresponding obligations, the most important being an obligation to submit disputes for arbitration upon the failure of conciliation and not to sanction or resort to a strike until the provisions of the Act have been exhausted and a majority of its members have voted in favour of such a strike.

The Fifteenth Tripartite Labour Conference held at Naini Tal in May 1958 discussed the question of the recognition of trade unions and laid down the criteria for recognition. Some of the important points are as follows:-

- A) A union may be claimed to be recognized as a representative union for an industry in a local area, if it has a membership of at least 25 per cent of the workers of that industry in that area.

- B) When a union has been recognised, there should be no change in the position for a period of two years.
- C) Where there are several unions in an industry or an establishment, the one with the largest membership should be recognised.
- D) Only those unions which observe the code of discipline will be entitled to recognition.
- E) Where there are more unions than one, a union claiming recognition should have been functioning for at least one year after the registration. Where there is only one union, this condition would not apply.

The central organisations of the workers that attended the conference deliberated on the code of conduct for maintaining harmonious inter-union relationship and stated the principles. Some important principles are as follows:

- (1) Every employee in an industry or unit shall have freedom and right to join the union of his choice. No coercion shall be exercised in this matter.
- (2) There shall be no dual membership of unions. In the case of representative unions, it was agreed that this principle needed further examination.

- (3) There shall be unreserved acceptance of and respect for democratic functioning of trade unions.
- (4) There shall be regular and democratic elections of executive bodies and office-bearers of trade unions.
- (5) Ignorance and backwardness of workers shall not be exploited by any organisation. No organisation shall make excessive or extravagant demands.
- (6) Casteism, communalism and provincialism shall be eschewed by all unions.
- (7) There shall be no violence, coercion, intimidation or personal vilification in inter-union dealings.

One Union in One Industry

In England and in other countries, trade unions are generally started on a craft basis. In the same industry, on the basis of the class of employment, separate unions come into existence. The industrialist or the capitalist or the employee will always attempt to put one unit against another whenever direct action is apprehended. In Great Britain, in the initial stages, there was also, sometimes, division between skilled and unskilled workers. This inevitably led to much bitterness between these classes. Today, in Ichalkaranji, we find, there are three unions which play

an important role in textile-workers. These unions are working under the guidance of their central unit.

The employers and government should fully realise that trade unions have come to stay as part and parcel of the economic system and are necessary for the advancement of national economy.

It is the trade union alone that represents the grievances and demands of workers, and if industrial peace is to be secured, it can only be through an understanding between employers' and workers' organisations. Mutual understanding in this regard would be greatly facilitated if the principle of "one union in one industry" is fully established and adhered to in practice. Hence the fate of the working class movement is not different from other labour movements. As there are three different Unions at work, it has created a non-conducive atmosphere in Ichalkaranji. In the next chapter an effort is made to understand these various trade unions in Ichalkaranji.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹
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²
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4

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