

CHAPTER - II

WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNIONS
IN INDIA : REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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2.1 INTRODUCTION :

The present chapter is devoted to summarize the important findings of *empirical* studies on workers' participation in trade unions in India.

After independence, India has adopted a policy of rapid industrialization through five year plans. The first five year plan indicated that the labour is the principal instrument in the fulfilment of the targets of the plan and in the achievement of economic progress generally. The improvement of labour class conditions, therefore becomes important for the development of India's economy.

The workers organize into trade unions as a means through which they can deal with the employers collectively and the attitude of Government of India is also to consider it as a part of industrial system. N.R.Sheth notes that "the trade unions are an essential ingredient of modern industrial society. Hence sociological studies of trade unionism are as important as those of industrial organizations".¹ In the present century the trade union has been considered as "a continuing organization of workers established for the purpose of protecting or improving

through collective action, the economic and social status of its members".²

On this background of role of trade unions, the importance of actual participation of workers in union activities can be made clear by the concept of union democracy. "In 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 constitute a critical measure of real union democracy."³ Thus the workers' participation in trade unions is the significant aspect of union democracy.

2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

'The following studies have been made with reference to workers' participation in trade union activities in India.

"THE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL WORKERS"⁴

Baldev Raj Sharma studied 262 industrial workers in 1965-66 in an automobile plant in Bombay. He used following three questions to measure union participation.

- i) How often do workers attend factory union meetings ?
- ii) Have they ever been a union representatives?
- iii) Can they recall the names of the present union representatives ?

Sharma found that the level of union participation among the workers studied was relatively low. Only 27.4 percent of the workers attend almost every union meeting while 31.7 per cent do not attend any meeting at all. Of the remaining workers, 4.8 per cent attend more than half the meetings, ten per cent about half the meetings and 26.1 per cent only once in a while. This relatively low participation is reflected in 96.9 per cent of the workers either not speaking or rarely speaking in the union meetings and finally only 2.6 per cent of the workers have ever been union representatives.

Sharma found that high interest in union is not directly converted into participation. This means that an interest in union need not always be translated into actual participation in its activities.

Sharma examined religion, caste, education, occupational background and rural urban background with regard to the socio-cultural background of the workers and found that these factors did not appear to influence union participation.

Sharma examined age, life-orientation, marital status, number of children, occupational aspirations and ideological intensity as the personal factors of workers and found that the middle age group is distinctly low in union participation compared to those in the young and old

age groups. Sharma found that marital status seems to have the lowest independent influence upon union participation and those workers who were in higher status job and married were more active in union activities.

Shamas examined family integration, neighbourhood involvement, community involvement, participation in voluntary organization and political activism as out-of-plant factors and found that no out plant factor is associated with union participation. In other words, the fact that a person is happy and involved in various aspects of his life outside the factory does not seem to influence his participation in union activities.

Sharma examined occupational status, wages and seniority as in-plant factors and found that union participation is higher among the workers who occupy high status jobs, earn high wages or have much seniority in the company.

Apart from all above factors, Sharma examined job satisfaction, occupational satisfaction, favourableness to the company, alienation and commitment to industrial work as the factors of workers satisfaction and found that none of these factors was significantly related to union participation.

" THE WORKER AND HIS UNION : A STUDY IN SOUTH INDIA"⁵

E.A.Ramaswamy studied the Coimbatore District Textile Workers' Union in 1963-64. The source of data for the study

was interviews with few top leaders and behavioural data obtained through intensive field work lasting about fifteen months using the technique of observation. Towards the end of field work a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 74 textile union members and local leaders in three mills.

Ramaswamy found that the women workers were the most apathetic section of unionists and women's participation in union goes only as far as paying union dues.

Ramaswamy also observed that the textile workers union was more active than any other unions in Coimbatore and there was high degree of membership involvement on a more continuous basis in those typical activities which were at best peripheral to job related interests.

"UNION INVOLVEMENT REVISITED"⁶

In 1971, B.R.Sharma studied blue-collar workers from eight firms covering Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The data regarding attendance at union meetings indicate that "15.42 per cent attended almost every meeting, 1.93 per cent more than half the time, 3.35 per cent about half the time, 22.88 per cent once in a while, 25.01 per cent never and 31.41 per cent not ascertained (including not applicable).

The data regarding speaking at union meetings shows that 1.52 per cent speak almost at every meeting,

1.42 per cent about half the time, 6.65 per cent rarely, 33.79 per cent never and 56.62 per cent not ascertained (including not applicable). The data regarding post of office bearer of the union shows that 3.40 per cent had been office bearers, whereas 66.01 per cent had not been office bearers and 30.59 per cent not ascertained (including not applicable)." Thus this study also indicates low level of workers participation in union activities.

"TRADE UNIONISM ; MYTH AND REALITY, UNIONISM
IN THE TATA IRON AND STEEL COMPANY"⁷

Kuriakose Mankoottam studied 379 workers from Tata workers union (TWU) during the period March 1973 to June 1974. The Tata workers' union of the employees of Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) Jamshedpur, is often regarded as one of the India's model trade unions.

Mankoottam found that the workers who become members for specific purposes rarely remain active members after their grievances have been resolved or suppressed. Ordinarily an employee pays his dues in full only when he has a grievance of some kind and seeks redress through the mediation of the union.

Mankoottam observed that ordinary members were not having the interest in union election. 173 members out of 263 interviewed were unaware of the constitutional requirements regarding frequency of elections, as also the

precise years in which elections had been held. Moreover a very small member, only 12 among 263, claimed to take an active part in the elections, as for instance, in canvassing for and openly supporting one candidate or another.

Mankottam found that TISCO provides accommodation, medical, educational and recreational facilities in such a way that employees are satisfied with it. This is one of the factors responsible for the fact that employees major loyalty lies with the company rather than the union. This has led to the low degree of membership involvement in union activities. Thus Mankottam found low degree of workers participation in trade union activities.

"MANAGERS AND WORKERS IN ENGINEERING INDUSTRIES"⁸

Pramod Varma studied 286 engineering industry workers from five medium firms in Ahmedabad and Baroda region. It was found that "while the workers thought that the unions were necessary, they were neither interested nor involved in union activities to the same extent".

"AS LABOUR ORGANIZES"⁹

S.M.Pandey studied Kanpur Cotton Textile Industry and observed that "the participation of members in union meetings and union sponsored strike and demonstration etc. is very limited. The lack of workers' interests in unionism is manifested in a very low attendance at union meetings (sometimes it is less than 1 per cent) except during the

period of strikes and lookouts when it goes up slightly. The meetings organized at mill gates and union offices are sometimes adjourned for want of quorum and in many cases no members who come out during off time and even non workers are counted as union members for quorum". Thus Pandey found low degree of participation of workers in union activities.

"MANAGEMENT OF TRADE UNIONS"¹⁰

Ishwar Dayal and B.R.Sharma studied five unions in Bombay, having 309 workers. They found that "Only 27.5 per cent of the respondents attended all meetings, 58.6 per cent attended only some meetings and the remaining 13.9 per cent did not attend any meeting. 82.5 per cent of workers never spoke at union meetings".

"TRADE UNIONISM IN DELHI'S BUILDING INDUSTRY"¹¹

S.M.Pandey and C.M.Vikdram studied 713 workers in the organized building industry in Delhi. They found low participation with reference to attendance at meetings as "only 11 per cent workers stated that they generally attended union meetings, 42 per cent rarely attended union meetings and 47 per cent never attended any union meetings".

On the same lines in a detailed study of engineering factory at Rajnagar, Sheth N.R.states that "the general meetings of the union were very poorly attended.....

they said, they would be satisfied with hearing or reading reports of the meetings".¹²

Similarly, in the study of political affiliation and union mindness of 258 workers, Sheth found that "22.0 per cent had high level participation, 52.4 per cent low level participation and 25.6 per cent non participation in unions."¹³

"SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF TRADE UNIONISM IN INDIA"¹⁴

R.P.Sinha studied the workers from four unions in the Bokaro Steel Plant in Bihar. The four unions studied by Sinha were Bokaro steel workers union (S.W.U.), Ispat Kamgar Union (I.K.U.), Bokaro Karmchari Panchayat (B.K.P.) and Pragatisheel Karmachari Sanghatana (P.K.S.). As far as workers participation in union is concerned Sinha found that "the bulk of members of S.W.U.(44 %) and B.K.P.(68%) have exhibited their propensity for low participation in union activities. The members of P.K.S.participate moderately (54 %) whereas the members of I.K.U.have revealed high participation (64 %). If the responses of the members of S.W.U. and P.K.S.for high as well as moderate participation are lumped together, the response pattern thus obtained tends to show high participation of members of the three respective unions in union activities".

Sinha found that the reasons for low participation of the members in union activities are attributed to the

unavailability of leaders as well as to infrequent meetings. Whereas the reasons for high participation are attributed to efficient, sincere and democratic leadership and also to the regular classes organised by unions to make workers aware of their rights duties and responsibilities as industrial workers.

2.3 GENERAL TREND OF WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES :

On the basis of the above studies made in different parts of India (i.e. in Bombay, Coimbatore, Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Kanpur and Delhi.), it can be said that the union participation is related to many variables both internal and external to work situation. Generally the interest of worker in union is high but it is not always be translated into actual participation in union activities. The studies made by Sharma, Ramaswamy, Mankootam, Varma, Pandey, Vikram and Sinha, are of empirical nature. All these studies except the study of Sinha, indicate the general trend of low level of workers' participation in trade union activities and the reasons for low participation as stated by these scholars are illiteracy, poverty, traditional attitude, daily commuters, status consciousness, persistent mentality to obey and heavy familial responsibilities. On the other hand Sinha in his study of workers from four unions in Bokaro steel plant in Bihar found high

level of participation and the reasons for high participation are attributed not only to efficient, sincere and democratic leadership but also to regular classes organised by unions to make aware workers their rights, duties and responsibilities as industrial workers.

Thus it can undoubtedly be said that there has been a general trend of low degree of workers' participation in trade union activities.

After looking into the details of engineering industry in Kolhapur and review of literature, it is necessary to see the methodology adopted for the present study. The Chapter III presents detailed information on this aspect.

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