
CHAPTER - II

STUDIES ON TRADE UNIONISM AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

C H A P T E R - I I

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AND

METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Extensive and often repetitive literature is available on the emergence and growth of trade unionism in India (Sheth and Patel : 21). Sinha (1984 : 3) has broadly categorized the literature available on trade unionism as below :

- a) Studies which have sought to explain the process of unionism and its growth either at national level or at local level or at both;
- b) Empirical as well as theoretical investigations which have tried to diagnose motives of industrial workers for unionization;
- c) Studies which have attempted at ascertaining union involvement and participation among union members;
- d) Studies which have sought to describe the inter-relationship between unionism and job satisfaction;
- e) Empirical investigations which have examined the patterns of leadership in trade union and;
- f) Studies whose primary concern is to examine factionalism within the union.

Sinha points out that there is a perpetual lack of micro studies in the milieu of sociological investigation with particular emphasis on

labour organizations. Again, as Sheth and Patel (1979: 21) observe, not much study has yet been made on trade unionism in specific areas of industries.

Considering appropriate in the context of the present work, a brief review of few available empirical micro studies on unionism carried out in specific industrial establishments is attempted below.

Sheth (1960) has shown how a trade union works in a concrete situation. He has attempted to describe the growth and working of unionism in an Indian Factory (which author referred to as the oriental located on the outskirts of Rajnagar town in western India) against the social background of its personnel and the employer-employee relationship within the factory.

In the beginning, the oriental had no connection with any trade union working in Rajnagar. Because the oriental was a small factory, recruitment of personnel was largely through personal channels, the M.D. was regarded as most decent and considerate than most other factory owners in the area, the relationsh between the employer and employees were personal, not contractual, and grievances were being settled down with ease. Need of the trade union was not felt by the workers.

However, things began to change after independence. The factory secured a stable and expanding market, the size of the working force went on increasing, the intimate contact between top executives and workers substantially decreased and the relationship became less personal than ever before, the workers were also being gradually influenced by the wider political and social events.

Sheth N.R. analyzes the failure of the 17 days' union strike by showing that the different groups within the trade union, viz. workers, representatives and professional leaders had little common ground between them. For the most workers the main function of the union was that, it relieved them of harsh treatment from officers and supervisors. For various reasons, many workers were not really interested in unionism. The professional leaders had very little time to be spent on oriental union and they regarded workers as illiterates, unintelligent and rough folk. The workers on their part regarded the leaders as hot headed persons, who sometime behave arrogantly than their supervisors and officers. There was much distance between workers and leaders. The representative in the oriental believed that they worked for their interest of the workers, at the cost of their own interests. On the other hand, a large number of workers believed that the management unduly favoured representatives by indirectly giving them money in the form of extra work on contract basis. Thus these groups in the oriental appeared rather mutually antagonistic groups with mutually exclusive interests and a wide social gap between one another.

Bogaert's (1970) study deals with the development of trade unionism in the docks of Calcutta and Bombay. He has studied two unions namely the Calcutta Port Shramik Union (CPSU) and the Transport and Dock Workers Union, Bombay (TDWUB). It probes deep into the factors that account for the relative success of two particular unions and throws light on the organizational growth of these unions, the leadership pattern they have developed, their role in integrating the labour force, their relations with management and Government and their evolution towards political emancipation.

About the two unions he writes, "the CPSU and the TDWUB are organizationally well developed in terms of membership, financial and personnel resources and office facilities. They have scored relatively better in the field of institutional growth and survival. The CPSU and the TDWUB have had the benefit of professional leadership. It becomes also understandable why more than others they have grown organizationally and have had to rely less and less on the support of political parties. The two unions under study have been able to establish a certain measure of effective control over wages and working conditions". The following conditions seem to have influenced the success of union : the degree of commitment of the labour force, management's acceptance of union, the legal frame work and the political climate.

About the leadership typology he notes, "in the dock unions two layers of leaders are clearly distinguishable : top leaders and second rank leaders. These top leaders can be subdivided into "big name" leaders and "professional" leaders.

Big name leaders are lawyers, medical practitioners, teachers or office bearers of political parties who devote part of their time to trade union work.

Professional leaders are those who devote all their time and attention to trade union work.

The second rank leaders form the rest of the leadership cadre of the unions. This group can be subdivided according to the particular function which they fulfil.

Feed back or transmission belt leaders on the one hand and union executives and office staff on the other. The union executives consist of office bearers occupying such posts as secretary, treasurer or organizer. In status they rank next to top leaders.

Political unionism is often branded as a defect and a cause of the weakness and division of the trade union movement. However, Bogaert argues that it is necessary to stress also its positive role.

He concludes that a union stands a better chance to succeed if it has committed labour force, as members, favourable attitude on the part of management permissive legal frame work, professional leadership that has breadth of vision and commitment to wider social goals, financial stability and bureaucratization of business procedures.

Pandey (1970) has carried out a study of unionism in the Kolhapur Cotton Textile Industry. The growth and character of trade unionism in a country or region is conditioned by a complex set of social, economic, and political factors. Therefore, trade unionism is bound to reveal varying characteristics in different situations.

Study is mainly that of region-cum-industry with a view to identifying various historical and institutional developments at the local level that have moulded trade unionism. The main burden of Pandey's study is to provide a systematic account of origin, growth and present position of trade unionism in Kanpur with particular reference to its cotton textile industry, and to identify the main factors that have influenced it in various phases of its development.

The study is based mainly on unpublished material (trade union records, memoranda, letters and reports) which could be collected from some old union leaders, offices of the Labour Commissioner and the registers of trade unions. Newspaper reports also form a major source of information.

The study clearly supports the hypothesis about the inevitability of political character of unionism and its weakening effects. In Kanpur, unions are closely aligned with political parties. Unions have been promoted, organized and controlled by political parties, and political leaders continue to dominate the unions now.

The prevalence of inter-union as well as intra-union rivalries in Kanpur has accelerated the quantitative growth of trade unionism, but has weakened it qualitatively. This has made leadership more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the members and alert from external dangers when members were more active.

Kanpur trade unionism is characterized by multiplicity of small unions, poor finances and unsuccessful work stoppages making it rather ineffective. Besides being a potent source of avoidable industrial strife and mutual hostilities, inter and intra-union rivalries obstructed the unions from realizing their professed goals and forming a common front to launch any major united struggle since 1955.

Ramaswamy (1977) has carried out a study of textile workers union (TWU), Coimbatore. The choice of Coimbatore for this study was influenced by the existence of the large textile industry in the district employing over 54,000 workers and the tradition of militant unionism in the industry since the late thirties. The union has had its ups and downs occasioned by employer hostility and internal schism. The TWU was affiliated to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha at the national level.

This study leans heavily on behavioural data obtained through intensive field work, using the technique of observation. Secondary sources of data such as union and factory records have been made use of where

available. The questionnaire was constructed for the limited purpose of getting objective data.

The mill workers in Coimbatore organize for much the same reasons as workers anywhere else. More specifically wage increases reasonable work assignment a large annual bonus and safeguarding workers from abusive treatment by jobber of the union.

Rival unionism has plagued the Coimbatore workers even since the first split in 1937. It was ideological conflict which caused this rift as well as the subsequent one and frustrated attempt of working class unity.

According to Ramaswamy the notion that between the union and the political party it is the latter which plays the big brother has been uncritically accepted. The relationship between the two could be depending on the size and strength of the union could the party and also on whether the party in question is in power. It is unrealistic to assume that the party can dominate the union under any and all conditions. Moreover the outside leaders need not merely be the mouthpiece of the party in the union.

One of the important points that emerges from Dr. Ramaswamy's account is the deep involvement of the rank and file of the workers in party politics. This finding is unconsentional in the sense that generally it is the leaders who are credited with commitment to the party while the political awareness of the workers is believed to be weak.

The study by Dr. Sinha (1984) trade union is a micro study done in the Bokaro Steel Plant and as such provides valuable insights into the working of the trade union system. It deals with the growth of unionism

in steel plant, its organizational structure and the nature and impact of factionalism. The author has also discussed the differential perception of the objectives by the leaders and the members in the union. This study of motivation helps explain their participation and involvement in union activities. He throws some light on the socio-economic characteristics of union, their self-image and perception by the mass of the members

The interesting feature which characterizes unionism in Bokaro is that workers do not generally organise unions for immediate economic benefits. They have not joined due to the feeling of unrest and futility resulting from continuing social and technological changes. They regard unions as mechanism of ventilating grievances and of establishing what is myopic in reality at the present juncture, harmonious relationship with the management. Harnessing good relationship with the management is perhaps the most ideal desire natured by them and absence of supervisors abnoxious behaviour toward workers as a determinant of the latter's joining a union provides an evidence of this.

A critical scrutiny of the social background of union leaders reveals that middle class professionals and intellectuals who are different from the ordinary members and who figure prominently in the studies of Indian trade unionism are typically absent in the unions of Bokaro. The bulk of leaders in Bokaro are industrial workers.

Momkootam (1982) studied 379 workers from Tata Workers Union (TWU) during the period March 1973 to June 1974. The Tata Workers Union of the employee of Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) Jamshedpur, is often regarded as one of the India's model trade union.

Momkootam found that the workers who became members for specific purpose rarely active member 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.

Momkootam 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 election had been hold. Moreover a very small numbe, only 12 among 263, claimed to take an active part in the elections, as for instances, in canvassing for and openly supporting one candidate or another.

Momkootam 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.

Tandon's (1984) study has focussed primarily on trade unions as organisations. The study looked at the history of emergence of the trade union, characteristics of its leadership and membership, its formal and informal structure, the processes of internal regulation and external linkages. Eight trade unions varying on dimensions of technology, region, affiliation, size, recognition etc., were studied in depth.

He points out that a typical union organisation in India has very limited goals. These goals are primarily concerned with improving the economic status of union members. The context of this improvement is also limited to the immediate job. Thus most unions define their objectives as securing the rights of workers improving the economic status of workers and solving job related problems. This limited perspective of union organisations, therefore, makes them focus on wages, salaries, benefits, grievances, promotions etc., within a work organisation.

The data of this study has shown that union leaders are more educated, have higher skilled or white collar jobs and consequently higher salary than ordinary members. This finding suggests that when representatives are selected/elected from the shops/departments/divisions, they tend to be systematically different from members on these dimensions. The same appears to be the case for office bearers. In this study, members, activists and leaders were similar in age and agricultural background. However, leaders had significantly more formal education than members.

The difference between union leaders and members have several implications for the internal functioning of trade union organisations. The most crucial impact of these trends is on the communication, participation and control processes within the organisation. As the data from this study show members are apathetic, they do not have knowledge of union affairs, lack participation in and influence over the union's functioning. Union organisations are run by a few of the office-bearers, some of whom have concentrated power in their hands. The decision making in the union is controlled by a few and the large majority of workers remains indifferent.

One of the important point that emerges from Tandon's account is that the 'outside' and politically active leadership further enhances the

tendency towards concentration of power in the hands of a few leaders. These leaders not only have the skills, political connections and necessary vision to run the affairs of union organisation, they are also seen to be capable by members and other internal leaders. As a result, reliance on such leaders continues, even when they desire to decentralise the functioning of the union.

Secondly, the availability of alternative leadership may be severely limited in some union organisations. This may be particularly true where members are illiterate, unskilled and poor, where outside leadership is not interested; the region may be remote; the size very small; etc.

Tandon notes that the members of all the unions which he studied expected the union to improve their job-related conditions. And they seemed to have willingly withdrawn themselves from day-to-day functioning of the union.

Tandon comes to the conclusion that the potential for unions playing a crucial role in the socio-economic transformation of the country is still to be fully realised.

As the above review indicates, few micro studies on unionism are available in case of industries like textile, railways, docks, steel etc., however scholars have not paid attention to the study of unionism in sugar industries in co-operative sector. The present study aims to understand the trade union working in a cooperative sugar factory located at Kasba Bavda, Kolhapur.

THE PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

(A) The Problem :

There are very few empirical micro studies of trade unions working in specific industries and areas. While reviewing the studies of trade unions from early years till 1969, Sehth and Patel (1979 : 21-22) have pointed out that the internal structure of a union is an important, subject of study for the industrial sociologist and that the systematic studies of unionism in various sectors of industry and areas should be encouraged. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

The present study aims to understand the growth, development and organizational aspects of the trade union working in a cooperative sugar factory.

(B) Objectives of the Study :

The objectives of the present study are as follows -

1. To study the emergence, growth and development of the trade union in Chh. Rajaram Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., Kasba Bavda.
2. To study various organizational aspects of the trade union (i.e., Sakhar Kamgar Union).
3. To study leader's and member's involvement in the union.

(C) Selection of the Union :

A number of trade unions are functioning in various industries in Kolhapur. For the purpose of present study a trade union known as "Sakhar Kamgar Union" is selected. The 'Sakhar Kamgar Union' is one of the oldest unions in the city, therefore, this union was selected. The union came into existence in 1944.

(D) Selection of the Sugar Factory :

At present, "Sakhar Kamgar Union" is functioning in three co-operative sugar factories of the Karveer Taluka, viz., 1) Chh. Rajaram Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., Kasba Bavda (previously known as "Kolhapur Sugar Mill"). 2) Kumbhi-Kasari Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., Kuditre, 3) Bhogawati Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., Mouninagar.

Of these three cooperative sugar factories, Chh. Rajaram Sahakari Karkhana Ltd., Kasba Bavda is selected for studying the working of the "Sakhar Kamgar Union". The selection of this sugar co-operative was guided by the following considerations.

1. This factory is the first sugar factory established in the Kolhapur district.
2. This sugar factory is having a long history of dynamic character. The factory was established in 1932. This sugar factory was founded by Chh. Rajaram Maharaj of Kolhapur. It was in private sector for a period of about 40 years, bearing the name "Kolhapur Sugar Mill". In 1984-85 the "Kolhapur Sugar Mill" was converted into a cooperative sugar factory. Since then, the factory is known as "Chh. Rajaram Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., Kasba-Bavda". Thus the sugar factory is having a long history of dynamic character.
3. The Sakhar Kamgar union first started functioning in this factory and later on it started operating in other two factories mentioned above.
4. During the period of this study the researcher was staying convenient to collect data from the respondents working in this factory.

E) Selection of the Respondents :

At the time of this research work there were 905 workers/employees in the Chh. Rajaram Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., Kasba Bavda. Out of these a sample of 45 employees i.e., 5% of the total workforce, was selected on the basis of random sampling technique.

F) Interview Schedule : Tool for Data Collection :

Keeping in view the objectives of the present study, two interview schedules were prepared for collecting data from the union leaders and the members of the Sakhar Kamgar Union.

G) Data Collection :

The data for present study were collected between October 1992 and June 1993.

Keeping in view the above mentioned objectives of the study, the data from (a) the leaders of the union (b) selected workers of the Chh. Rajaram Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana and (c) the office of the 'Sakhar Kamgar Union' were collected.

The data regarding the registration of the union, union leaders and members, constitution of the union etc., were obtained from the union office.

The data from both the leaders and the selected sample of workers were personally collected with the help of the interview schedules, by the researcher.

H) Analysis, Interpretation and Presentation of Data :

The data are classified, analysed and interpreted with the ehlp of simple statistical techniques such as percentages and by giving references of studies on trade unionism in India.

The data are presented in following chapters.

1. Sakhar Kamgar Union : Emergence, Development and Organizational features.
2. Sakhar Kamgar Union : The Leaders, Members and Non-members.
3. Summary and Conclusions.

Thus, having looked at the methodological details of the present study in this chapter, the next chapter is devoted to outline the origin, development and organizational features and major achievements of the Sakhar Kamgar Union.

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