

C H A P T E R - IIHISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN INDIA

The birth of the trade union movement in India, as we understand at present, may however, be traced back to first quarter of the 20th century, although some forms of trade union organisations came into existence after the establishment of the factories in India. In 1885 modern trade unionism in India came into existence as an outcome of the factory system of production and the capitalistic order of society. If we take into account the growth of trade union movement in India it seems that is slow, due to the slow progress of industrialisation of the country, illiteracy of the workers, their migratory habits and the heterogeneous composition of the labour force in the industrial centres.

There are different stages of the growth of trade union movement in India. If we observe the various stages, it seems that the pattern of growth and characteristics of the movement in different stages was shaped by the existing social, economic and political characteristics of each period e.g. in the pre first war period, the labour movement was humanitarian in nature and aimed at the enactment of factory legislation. On the other hand in the pre independence period the movement took a political character.

2.1 STAGES OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN INDIA :

I) 1875 to 1911 :

The first cotton mill in India was established in 1854 in Bombay, and the first Jute Mill in 1855 in Bengal. This was the beginning of modern factory system in India.¹ In this period some important events occurred and these events proved a beginning of trade union movement in India. The first factory commission was appointed in 1875 and first factory Act was passed in 1881.

But this Act was highly inadequate and its provisions were disappointing. Due to such circumstances a factory worker Mr. N.M. Lokhande called for a Conference of workers in Bombay to make representation to another factory commission appointed in 1884. Then further Mr. Lokhande convened a mass meeting of about 10,000 workers in Bombay on April 24, 1890. In response to this a new factory Act was passed in 1891. Encouraged by this success, Mr. Lokhande organised The Bombay Millhands Associations and this was the first labour association in India. After 1890 large number of labour associations were started in the country. But the most notable peculiarity of this stage was that, there was complete absence of the strikes for getting grievances redressed. And for this reason this period has been characterised as the social welfare period.

II) 1918 to 1924 :

The trade union movement in this period was in the true modern sense. During this period a number of trade unions came into existence in the country, various factors influenced the growth of trade union movement in India during this period. e.g. economic and political conditions prevailing in the country, favourable effect of Russian revolution, labour movement in India and establishment of ILO in 1990. All India and Trade Union Congress was also formed in this period in 1920.

III) 1924 to 1935 :

This period is known as the period of left wing trade unionism, during this period the communists captured the labour movement. The trade union congress was split up. It conducted some of the most violent strikes in India, as wages were reduced in depression period and large unemployment caused by great world depression.

IV) 1935 to 1939 :

This period is a healthy development period of trade union movement in India, because some trade unions merged into one another in this period e.g. in 1935. The Red Trade Union Congress merged itself with the AITUC. The number of trade Unions increased from 101 in June 1935 to 169 in June 1939.

V) 1939 to 1946 :

The Second World War gave further impetus to its growth and development of the trade unionism. Indian trade unions made progress not only in respect of numbers and membership but also in respect of trade union funds. In 1940 the National Trade Union Federation which was since 1938 only an affiliated body of AITUC dissolved itself and merged itself with the parent body, but this unity did not last for long time. In the short period this federation disaffiliated from the congress and formed a new body known as the Indian Federation of Labour in 1941, under the leadership Mr. M.N.Roy.

VI) THE POST IIInd WORLD WAR AND THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD :

In the post war period due to the rapid increase in price level the cost of living of the workers increased remarkably and it worsened living conditions of the workers, members and funds of the trade unions increased rapidly. As result of emergence of new political party named as socialist party, the HMS came into existance in 1948 further as a result of differences of opinion existing in the trade union it was split up.

The following table No. 2.1 shows the growth of trade unions and their membership during the post independence period.

TABLE NO.2.1GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS FROM 1945-1946 to 1981-1982

Year	No. of Registered Trade Unions	No. of Unions submitting returns	Total membership of Unions submitting returns (in 000')
1945 - 1946	1087 (100)	555 (100)	864 (100)
1947 - 1948	2666 (245)	1628 (293)	1663 (192)
1950 - 1951	3766 (346)	2002 (361)	1756 (203)
1960 - 1961	11312 (1041)	6813 (1228)	4013 (464)
1965 - 1966	14686 (1351)	7244 (1305)	4392 (508)
1968 - 1969	18039 (1660)	6655 (1199)	3821 (442)
1972 - 1973	26316 (2421)	8349 (1504)	5871 (680)
1973 - 1974	26441 (2431)	8259 (1488)	5455 (631)
1974 - 1975	29391 (2704)	9840 (1773)	6267 (725)
1975 - 1976	28910 (2660)	8859 (1596)	6021 (697)
1976 - 1977	29390 (2704)	8286 (1493)	5412 (633)
1981 - 1982	35614 (3276)	6590 (1187)	5377 (622)

Note : Figures in bracket indicate index number.

- SOURCE : 1. Economics of Labour and Industrial Relations,
By. Dr. T.N. Bhagoliwal, Sahitya Bhavan Agre Ed. 1985
P.No. 259 (Upto 1976-77)
2. Industrial Economics by Singh and Sadhu, Himalaya
Publishing House, P.No. 381 (Upto 1981-82).

The above table shows that there is a rapid growth in number of registered trade union since 1945-46. There were one thousand (1000) registered trade unions in 1945-46.

After independence the number of registered trade unions increased continuously. If we calculate index number of registered trade unions by taking 1945-46 as the base year we find that the index number of the registered trade unions has increased to 2,604 during the entire period from 1946-77. Thus growth was very much marked from 1960-61.

After the independence Indian Government adopted planning technique and the provisions were made regarding the development of agricultural as well as the industrial sector. In the first five year plan emphasis was given on agricultural sector fortunately as a result of favourable monsoon the agricultural production increased more than the targets fixed for the first plan period.

In 1956 Government of India passed industrial policy resolution. Second Five Year Plan started in 1956 and the Government laid emphasis on the development of the industrial sector, special provisions were made for the development of industrial sector.

As a result number of trade unions also increased. If we take into account the total membership of the unions submitting

returns, we find that there is an increase in the membership as a result of trade unions, but the rate of increase in the membership was not corresponding the rate of registered trade unions. When the number of registered trade unions were 1,087 only 555 unions were submitting their returns in 1945-46 and the total membership of such unions 86,40,00.

As the number of trade unions increased the number of trade union submitting returns also increased, but at falling rate. This was particularly noticeable since 1968-69.

If we take into account the total membership of unions submitting returns initially the membership increased in 1965-66 but it decreased in 1968-69 remarkably further it increased in 1974-75 but then in 1975-76 to 1981-82 it has decreased. This decreasing tendency of the total membership of returns submitting unions indicates that, though the number of trade unions has been increasing the membership did not increase much.

2.2 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAIN TRADE UNIONS :

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND GROWTH :

The promotion of the economic, political, social and cultural interest of the workers is the main objective of the main central labour organisation. But those organisations

differ regarding certain basic principles.

1) INTUC :

The Indian National Trade Union Congress was formed in 1947 with active support and encouragement from congress leaders, and blessings of Mahatma Gandhi.²

The principle of this union was to bring about a peaceful and non-violent solution of industrial disputes. The aim of the INTUC is " to establish an order of society, which is free from hindrances in the way of all round development of its individual members, which fosters the growth of human personality in all its aspects and goes to the utmost limit in progressively eliminating social, political or economic exploitation and inequality, profit motive in the economic activity and organisation of society and the antisocial concentration of power in any form."³ To achieve this and other objectives the organisation urges placing of industry under national ownership and control in suitable form. This organisation believes in bringing about a change gradually through democratic and peaceful means, and it does not want to adopt radical methods for achieving its objectives. It is the most representative organisation of Indian workers. The INTUC is closely associated with ILO. Its representatives have attended meetings of various

bodies held by the ILO. In the beginning of 1978 there were 2,373 trade unions with a total membership of 2,44,8000 affiliated to INTUC. As on 31st, Dec. 1981 there were 3,457 trade unions and their membership was 35,09,326.

ii) AITUC :

The All India Trade Union Congress was formed in 1920, and now it is dominated by the communists. The main aim of it was to establish a socialistic state in India and to socialize and Nationalize the means of production, distribution and exchange. According to V.V.Giri the approach of the AITUC seems to be more, radical and certainly not a non-violent as that of the INTUC. The AITUC has ceased to be the most representative organisation of Indian workers. Since the establishment of the INTUC its membership is highly fluctuating. The organisation has state level organisations in various states. In the beginning of 1978, there were 4,213 unions with a total membership of 2,345 thousand of affilited to AITUC. As on 31st Dec. 1981.

iii) HMS :

The Hind Mazdoor Sabha was formed in 1948. This is central labour Association guided and controlled by socialists group. The aim of the organisation is to promote the establishment of

democratic socialistic society in India, and to protect the economic political social and cultural interest of the Indian working class. For the attainment of these and other objectives for which organisation stands, the methods. Employed shall be legitimate, peaceful and democratic. The HMS has also set up state and regional labour bodies to extend its influence over the workers and the unions. This organisation is strengthened in Maharashtra, West Bengal, Bihar and Delhi and a substantial part of its membership has been found in Railways, cotton Textile and coal mining industries. A number of post and Telegraph transports workers unions are also membership of this organisation. In the beginning 1978 there were 525 unions with a total membership of 1,114 thousand affiliated to HMS. As on 31st Dec. 1981 the No. of unions was 1,112 with total membership of 18,48,147.

iv) UTUC :

The United Trade Congress was formed in 1949, by some trade union leaders who attended conference called by the socialists in December 1948 who did not agree with the principles and objectives of the HMS.⁴ The main objectives of this organisation is to conduct trade union activities and build up Central Platform of labour on the broadest possible basis of trade union unity free from sections of party politics. The formal

aim of the UTUC is to establish a pure trade union movement as free as possible from any of the existing political parties. In the beginning 1978 there were 469 unions with a total membership of 363 thousand affiliated to UTUC. As on 31st Dec. 1981 the No. of 'Unions was 618 with total membership 6,08,052.

v) CITU :

A split in communist ranks after independence resulted in its division into AITUC and CITU. AITUC came under the control of communist party of India. While the communist party of India (Marxist) started the centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) in 1970 .

CITU is aggressive in performing its functions as compared to AITUC. As on 31st Dec. 1981, the total No. of Unions were 1,737 with total membership of 10,33,432.

2.3 LIMITATIONS AND OBSTACLES IN THE GROWTH OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT :

Trade unionism as a movement has made considerable progress in our country and the change in the political and economic situation has fundamentally affected the very outlook of the mass of the people. Yet the trade union movement in India has not grown up on sound lines and is today beset with many obstacles that considerably hamper its proper growth.

The various factors which have hampered the growth of genuine trade unionism in India can broadly be classified under two important heads i.e. internal and external.

A) INTERNAL FACTORS :

1. The lack of an enlightened labour force capable of managing and conducting the movement efficiently, purposefully and effectively has been a major internal deficiency sustained due to⁵
 - a) To lack of education.
 - b) Division of workers by race, religion, language, and caste.
 - c) Lack of proper commitment and migratory, nature of the industrial workers in India.
2. The general poverty and low level of wages have been other obstacles in the work of the organisation of stable trade union of India. The earnings of the workers have been so low that it becomes difficult for them to pay even a small subscription to their unions regularly. The workers may contribute some amount during the period of a strike. When they may expect some immediate gain but in a normal period they do not want to contribute to the unions.⁶ Because first of all they meet their necessary need from their earnings and as a result of this they cannot contribute to their unions, and this is why Indian trade unions are

suffering from weak financial position.

3. The trade unions in Indian are dependent for their leaders mainly on social or political⁷ workers lawyer and other professionals public men. Now in India, it has become a fashion among the politicians to become a leader of trade unions. Some times in many cases persons have a little knowledge of the background of labour problems, fundamentals of trade unionism the technique of industry. And even with little general education.
4. There is absence of united front of trade unions in India at present and movement is dominated by various political parties in the country. This factor leads to the unnecessary multiplicity of the trade unions in the same industry and consequent revolt amongst them. This revolt occasionally develops into antagonism between these leading labour organisations which often make the average workers in India confused and he fails to know the proper leaders. As a result of this the trade union movement in India has received a serious set back owing to the lack of unity among the various leading labour organisations.
5. Most of the trade unions in India have failed to realize the importance of mutual help and welfare activities.

organisation of labour cannot provide the various welfare activities in respect of inadequate funds. According to W.B. Catlin the greater the number of phases of the workers life which the union serves, the more secure the more secure, presumably, will be its hold upon his allegiance and the more effective its control of the trade.⁸ If the union gives proper attention to welfare activities, not only their membership increases but also they are likely to be active and stable organisation but unfortunately in India the unions in very few cases perform their important functions as a result the interest of the workers in their unions, has not been raised.

6. The low standards of life and fatigue of the work leave workers neither energy nor sufficient time to pursue the trade union activities.⁹ As a result of these factors workers have failed to perform their duties towards the trade union.

B) EXTERNAL FACTORS :

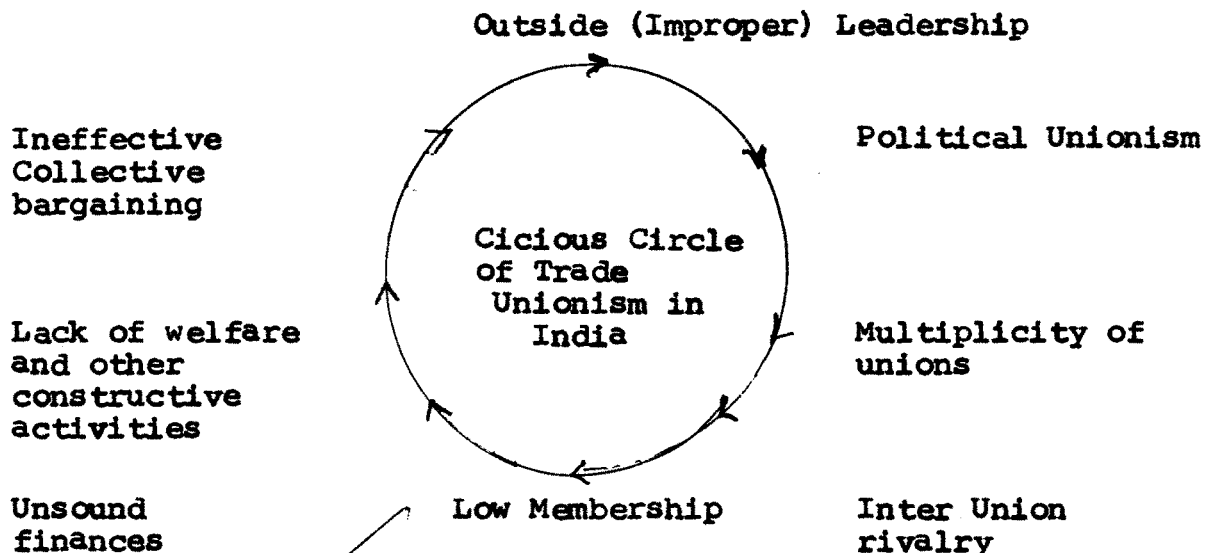
Some external factors are also responsible for low development of trade unionism in India such as :

1. The attitude of the employers in India as a whole has been hostile to the trade union movement in the country.¹⁰
The anti union activities of the employers have taken a

a variety of forms viz. victimization, establishment of rival unions in order to split the workers amongst the various unions, refusal for recognition of the organisation of workers retrenchment from mill premises, black listing and lockout etc.

2. The jobbers and other intermediaries have also been deeply hostile in India because they have been afraid that it would gradually destroy their power over the workers.
3. If we take into account the legal provisions we will find that there are certain deficiencies in legal provisions regarding the unions and industrial relations and it is considerable hindrance in the proper growth of trade unionism in India.

VARIOUS FACTORS INFLUENCING TRADE UNIONS INDIA ARE SHOWN IN THE FOLLOWING VICIOUS CIRCLE :



for Bhagatwal

In above diagram it seems clear that the outside leadership leads to the political unionism. The political unionism used to multiplicity of unions that means as a result of political leadership the number of trade unions came in existence and the number of parties. Then multiplicity leads to inter union rivalry and consequently it leads to low membership. As a result of low membership the concerned becomes financially unsound and due to this unsound financial position the union cannot do any welfare or other constructive activities and finally it leads to ineffective collective bargaining. In such situation the outside and improper leadership becomes necessary and again this vicious circle starts.

2.4 NEED FOR STRONG TRADE UNION :

Land labour, capital and organisation are the main factors of production. One cannot produce the product without them. The nature of the labour as factor of production is different from other factors of production. In these factors organisation is apart from other factors of production because it collects other factors together, manages them properly and keeps the process of production smoothly. If we consider remaining three factors of production viz. land, labour and capital the nature of labour is different from land and capital, because land capital are the visible factors, but labour is invisible one and it is a

power of labourer to work and any labourer cannot provide to work without his participation in the production process. In this way the labour and labourer are different. Labourer is a person and labour is power to work of such person. The main characteristic of the labour is that, it is perishable, any employee or worker cannot store his labour. On the other hand, land and capital are durable factors i.e. if the landlord decided not to use his land, the fertility of land cannot decrease, as the matter of fact employers exploits the working class by giving them low wage rates, unfavourable working conditions, more working hours etc. Therefore, the workers have to unite for protection of their above cited interests. Any individual cannot protect himself against the exploitation from employers.

The other necessity of the strong trade unionism is that most of the people from working class are illiterate. They have absence of technical knowledge and proper commitment to the job. Heterogeneous composition of the labour force divided by differences in language caste religions and creed is also found.

In this situation it is difficult to manage and increase the efficiency of trade unions. Therefore, it is necessary to build up strong trade unionism and its efficiency.

R E F E R E N C E S

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2. Dr. T.N. Bhagoliwal Economics of Labour Industrial Relations P.No. 260, Sahitya Bhavan Agra, Ed. 1985.
- 3 Ibid. P. No. 260.
4. Ibid. P.No. 262.
5. Ibid. P. No. 278.
6. Ibid. P. No. 278.
- 7 Ibid. P.No. 278.
8. Ibid. P.No. 279.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.