



CHAPTER NO. 5

TRADE UNION AND WORKERS PARTICIPATION

C H A P T E R - 5

TRADE UNION AND WORKERS' PARTICIPATION :

5.1 INTRODUCTION : Trade unions are voluntary organisations of workers formed to promote and protect their interest by collective action. The modern industrial concerns employ a large number of workers. Individually the workers are not able to complain their problems, so they organise themselves in to trade unions. The primary duty of a trade union is to solve the labour problems created by modern industry. The trade union through its organised action can eliminate exploitation and can provide better welfare facilities to workers.

A trade union " must possess definite aims, its members must be welded together in a united front for the good of the whole group rather than for the promotion of any selfish, individual interests; and it must, to be effective take on a definite and permanent form of organisation through which it strives to accomplish its goals " ¹

" The origin of the trade union movement in India may be traced back to the earliest times when in every village panchayats and guilds settled disputes between their members and masters. The first quarter of the twentieth century saw the birth of the trade union movement in India. The Government of India also has given importance to the association of workers as " the workers

1. Gordans watkins and Paul A Doda Labour problems, P.563.

right of association organisation and collective bargaining is to be accepted without reservation as the fundamental basis of mutual relationship. The attitude to trade unions should not be just a matter of toleration. They should be welcome and helped to function a part and parcel of industrial system " 1

5.2 Trade Unions in Ichalkaranji :

The Trade Union movement in Ichalkaranji during the second world war " the workers realized the necessity of forming their organisation to protect their interests particularly against the consequences of inflationary rise in prices. In 1943 ' Girani Kamagar Samiti was established. In 1948 it was recognised as The Ichalkaranji Girani Kamagar Samiti " This samiti was affiliated to the INTUC " 2

In 1967 Lal Bavata General Kamagar Union was established. This union was affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) Lal Bavata General Kamagar Union Solves number of problems of powerloom workers under the leadership of comred K.L. Malabade and comred Surtaji Salunkhe (General Secretary) from 1954 Lal Bavata Kamagar union was in existence under the leadership of comred S.P. Patil upto 1967.

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1. Govt. of India planning commission 'The first five year plan" P.577
 2. Kulkarni N.K. 'An economic survey of the weaving Industry of Ichalkaranji (Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, University of Poona 1959) P.230-231.
- INTUC - Indian National Trade Union Congress.

Today about 5000 weaving workers are registered under the Lal Bahadur General Kamagar Union apart from these members 10,000 workers are associated indirectly. For their ~~inte~~ common interests and for their united action.

The powerloom industry was having ~~tt~~ trade union practice even before independence and these workers were in Girani Kamagar Samiti. The same was the situation for the workers., who became union members during 1968-1983 (48% workers).

In general it can be said that the workers in the textile industry joined union as it is an older industry.

5.3 Motivation for joining Union :

E.A. Ramaswamy points out that " there are tangible gains to be had by way of wages and working conditions by unionizing. More specifically wages increase reasonable work assignments a large annual bonus and safeguarding workers from abusive treatment by jobbers and the management ~~treatment~~ have been the most important objective of the Unions "

Rose A.M. with his quantitative analysis remarks that " personal benefits, good cause and higher wages were the most frequently mentioned reasons for union membership "

The above statements shows that there are mainly economic reasons which motivate the workers to

join trade union. But alongwith economic reasons, there were other motivations like political group Socio-Psychological group which drives the workers to join union.

The general observation and information provided by the workers shows that greatest motivation that is economic factor for joining union.

5.4 Participation in Union Activities :

In general it can be said that majority of the workers having high interest in union. They attend meetings of the Union.

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 " ¹

In addition N.R. Sheth remark that participation by ordinary members in union activities is important for three reasons" first, a union exists basically to serve the interest and goals of its members;

1. K. Devaki Devi " Trade Union Democracy in India Indian Journal of Social work April 1978 P.70.

hence its effectiveness would depend largely on the extent to which the members seek to channelise their interests and achieve their goals through the medium of the union by their participation. Second if we accept the importance of union leadership emerging from the rank and file, the degree of participation by the latter in union work has considerable value as it may provide indicators of the patterns of leadership developing in concrete situations of unionism. Third, it is obvious that the iron law of oligarchy¹ or the tendency on the part of selected leaders to become all powerful, can be checked by a vigilant and participative membership'

These views show that when the members participate in the day to day activities of the trade union the union democracy becomes possible and there will be channel of communication between workers and their union leaders. The union leadership can emerge through participative activities of union members.

N.R. Sheth has selected seven indicators of Union participation " i) Union membership ii) Payment of Union dues iii) Visit to the union office iv) Perusal of union notices v) Participation in union elections vi) Active participation in elections to the work committees vii) Participation in important union activities such as union representation to the Management demonstrations organised by the union, membership work etc. "¹

1. Sheth N.R. " Workers Participation in Trade Union Activity " P. 283.

On the background of these studies it can be noted that the workers at Ichalkara nji had indicated high interest in union and high participation in the union activities.

5.5 Reasons for Non-Active Participation in Union Activities :

Among 100 workers who were members of the trade Union, 40 workers had never participated in union i.e. had never attended the union meetings, 15 workers had low participation i.e. these workers were not representatives did attend some of the meetings and did not stand to speak at such occasions and 55 workers had medium participation i.e. these workers were not representatives did attend all or some of the meetings and stood to speak at such occasions.

Workers were asked why they had not taken active participation in union activities. The answers were -i) They were coming from outside of Ichalkara nji (ii) They were having low level of education (iii) They were having personal familiar difficulties and (iv) They were avoiding participation by relying on their union leaders.

Seth N.R. also reports a similar apathy among workers towards union work due to " familiar and other obligations of workers ' a low position accorded to union work in society fear of management and unpleasant experiences with union leaders "

Thus majority of the workers were not taking active part in union activities they were satisfied with the union work.

5.6 Union Approach :

The significance of the trade union movement and its utility to workers lies in its ability to improve the conditions of labour According to the theory of collective bargaining, the interest of employees can be best protected by the creation of " trade union having a bargaining power equal to that possessed by the Management on the other side of the negotiating table. A strong trade union movement is therefore necessary both to safeguard the interests of labour and to help in achieving the targets of production.

Therefore certain objective of the union. Different methods are employed to attain these objectives " Some unions resort to social insurance and social welfare, others encourage collective bargaining and on its failure resort to strike, which a few follow the parliamentary method of bringing pressure upon the Govt. and the public to pass favourable labour legislation" ¹

The workers were asked what should be the approach of union to improve social & economic conditions they give three alternatives (i) fight militantly (ii) to work with determination (iii) bargain with management.

1. Punekar S.D. ' Trade Unionism in India " P. 212.