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THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN LABOUR MOVEMENT IN INDIA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

A trade union plays a significant part to support employee to advance their operational circumstance, service and safe guarding their interest and sustaining industrial relations. The trade union is an important constituent of democratic structure and functions on values of democracy such as common participation, participation in decision making process, management answerability to members, union selections, etc. Trade union movement in India, was initially structured after the First World War came to an end in 1918. Instantly after the war numerous trade unions came to be formed in India at significant industrial Centres, such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, etc. The trade unions have noteworthy success in satisfying the just demands of labourers in Indian. Till Independence few trade unions existed and now there are many trade unions are functioning in the different parts of the country.

Keywords: Trade Union, Decision Making, First World War, Management, Just Demands etc.

Introduction:

The history of trade union movement in India is not very old. The trade union movement started with industrial progress and development in India. The industrial growth in India began in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first organization that came into being was that of the industrialists after the Industrial revolution took place. The proprietors of the industries formed their organization. The entrepreneurs structured themselves in order to safeguard their interests. However there didn't exist any organization for the safeguard of interests of the working class. With advancement in industrialization, the misuse and exploitation of workers increased and a necessity for separate labour organization was sensed. In forming labour union, the initiative was taken by few positive social reformers. It resulted in the beginning of the Trade Unions in India.

Objective of my Paper

1. To study the Labour movement in India in general.
2. To explore the role Trade Unions Labour movement in India.
3. To bring out the involvement of Political and Social Leaders in the movement.
4. To highlight the struggle of the underprivileged working class for their rights.

Research Methodology

To write this paper, the data has mainly concentrated on textual approach. Books written by eminent scholars, articles, papers written on various National and International Journals have been considered to do the framework of this paper. Mostly secondary data has been used to write this paper.

This research paper ideas to take an account of the rise and progress of the Trade Union Movement in India and along with to highlight the fight of the underprivileged working class for their privileges.

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The Concept of Trade Union:

Trade unions are a major component of the system of modern industrial relations in any nation, each having their own set of objectives or goals to achieve according to their constitution and each having its own strategy to reach those goals. A trade union is an organisation formed by workers to protect their interests and improve their working conditions, among other goals. It is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving working conditions (Dankert, 1948).

In developing countries, the right to form a union and bargain collectively protects workers from exploitative and abusive conditions at work and puts pressure on employers to share productivity gains with their employees. Protection of basic worker and human rights in developing nations thus necessitates unionisation so that the working population can reap the benefits of economic growth (Ghosh & Geetika, 2007).

Trade unions are a legitimate system for organising workers to voice their rights and grievances. Without unions, companies would become either too paternalistic or too dictatorial (Thomas, 2005). Responsible unions play an important role in maintaining cordial relations between management and labour. The aims and objectives of the major trade unions in India are seen to vary according to their political ideologies (Ratnam, 2006).

Under the Trade Unions Act, 1926, "a trade union is any combination of persons whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workmen and employers, or between workmen and workmen, between employers and employers, or for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business, and includes the federation of two or more trade unions" (Gupta, 2010).

Primary Functions:

The primary function of a trade union is to promote and protect the interest of its members (Perlman, 1928; Hoxie, 1921). This can be summarised as follows: To improve working and living conditions and to represent workers' interests in various fora (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). To offer responsive cooperation in improving levels of production and productivity, discipline, and high standards of quality. To secure fair wages for workers. Madheswaran and Shanmugam (2003) have analysed the impact of trade unions on wages by estimating the union-non-union wage differential using a single wage equation, treating unionism as a dummy. They estimate that workers within the union sector earn 19% more than the workers in the non-union sector. To enlarge opportunities for promotion and training. To promote identity of workers' interests with their industries.

The formation of trade union structure began as discussion groups formed into professional organizations which had the following functions, -negotiating for better wages, -working hours, and working conditions (Ananaba, 1979). The labour movement arose as an outgrowth of the disparity between the power of employers and the powerlessness of individual employees (Fraser, 1999).

Trade Unions in India:

The trade unions are organizations of workers which work for the maintenance and enhancement of their economic status by asserting on an increase in the wages and upgrade in their working conditions, other facilities and benefits.

Trade unions in India are governed by the Trade Unions Act of 1926, which is the main legislation that provides various rules, regulations and controlling mechanisms related to trade unions. The contribution of trade unions to the development of the labour movement in South Asia, as well as at

the global level, is well recognised (Sinha, 2004).

The worker is not only an element of manufacture but a specific person whose entire life state is a matter of worry for the trade unions. In India, the trade unions function within the wider structure of Industrial Democracy. The chief structure of the trade unions below industrial democracy is that the trade unions are the associations of the working people, intended in appeal, based on the value of equality, working towards the realisation of the demands of the workers and they largely function on the values of majority rule and liberty to share in the judgement making. According to its arrangement, three types of trade unions are seen in India i.e., industrial unions, craft unions and general unions.

Trade Union Approaches/Theories:

The approaches/theories of trade unions can be categorized into the following five forms:

1. Revolutionary Theory:

The revolutionary theory of trade union is established by Karl Marx "This theory is also known as "the theory of class war and dialectical materialism". As per Marx, trade union was the principal organising centre to provide a situation for rationalizing the forces of working class people. According to Marx, the trade unions are the devices to uproot capitalism.

2. Evolutionary Theory:

Evolutionary theory also recognised as "theory of industrial democracy". It was articulated by Beatrice Webbs and Sydney. To them, trade unionism is an addition of the values of democracy in the industrial domain. Rather it can be termed as trade unionism is not only an device to defeat the capitalism, but a resources of balancing the negotiating power of labour and capital.

3. Theory of Industrial Jurisprudence:

S. H. Slitcher who wrote "Theory of Industrial Jurisprudence", says that the workers individually are unsuccessful in negotiating with employers for guarding their interests. As per his ideas, trade unionism aided as a resources for workers to safeguard them in work. This method of trade unionism, was designated by him as "a system of industrial jurisprudence".

4. Rebellion Theory:

Frank Tannenbaum, who wrote the "Rebellion Theory", called trade unionism is a natural consequence in the progress of mechanisation. As per his ideas, the use of machines leads to taking advantage and exploitation of workers. Therefore, machine is the reason and the result is labour movement, i.e., trade unionism.

5. The Gandhian Approach:

The Gandhian approach of trade unionism is constructed on "class partnership somewhat than class conflict and struggle". The Gandhian method of trade unionism is not only connected to material characteristic but also to the honest and knowledgeable characteristics.

As per the Trade Union Act, 1926, a Trade union can be viewed as "any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily to regulate the relations between workmen and employers or between workmen and workmen, or between employers and employers, or for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business, and includes any federation of two or more Trade Unions."

Growth of Trade Union and Labour Movement in India

In India, the Trade Union movement was in progress and directed primarily by humanitarians and few

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social groups. Initially it was and not by the workers and labourers. The Trade Union Movement has been reflected as the creation of industrial expansion since the second half of the 19th century.

The early phase of 1850 and 1900 saw the Indian trade union movement grow in India. It results in the progress of Indian Industrial groups. This period saw the extremely insufficient and pitiable working and existing conditions of the working and labour groups of India. This also saw the extremely long and unfair working hours and inhuman atmospheric condition for the workers. The industrialists were merely interested in the high productivity and more profitability. The salaries given to the workers were inadequate and little. The overall situations of the working classes in the industries were very sad. In order to control the working hours and the working conditions textile workers working in factories of India, the Indian Factories Act was endorsed in 1881.

The Indian Factory Act of 1881 was amended in 1891 due to Mr. N M Lokhande efforts. He has organized people from various sectors like Helpers, Rickshaw drivers etc. He later prepared a report on the working conditions of this workers and submitted the same to the Factory Labour Commission. Directed by Literate humanitarians and social workers like Mr. N. M. Lokhande, the slow but steady growth of the trade union movement was witnessed during this period.

Various strikes were seen in the two decades after 1880 in the various industrial towns of India. These strikes at different places showed workers to recognise the power of unified action for their demands to be heard. Although in India there was hardly any union seen in the actual sense. There were few small groups like Bombay Mill-Hands Association which had come in to existence.

The next phase of the Indian trade union movement arose during 1900 and 1947. This period was categorised by the progress of structured and well planned trade unions and political movements of the working class. This period also observed the beginning of militant trade union ideology in India.

The First World War (1914-1918) and the Russian revolution of 1917 gave a new opportunity to the Indian trade union movement. The subsequent period saw the organized efforts on the side of the workers to form the trade unions for their just demands. In 1918, at Madras, Mr. B. P. Wadia had organized trade union movements with help of workers of the Textile mills. Later he served strike notice to the Mill owners.

Mr. N. M. Lokhande who had formed the Bombay Mill Hands Association was effective in getting approved a weekly holiday from the Bombay Mill Owners Association for the workers. The Trade Union Movement in India became further structured and formed many unions and organisations in 1918 like Employees Association, Indian Seamen's Union, Indian Collie Association, Railway Men's Union, Port Trust Employees Union, Rickshaw Drivers Association, etc.

India during this phase saw the founding of the First National Trade Union Organization called the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920 (AITUC). The diverse labour unions and their representatives from all across India held a meeting in Bombay in 1920 and established the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Rai. Later on the Trade Union Law was also passed in the year 1926 due to Mr. N N Joshi efforts and it started to do the functioning from the year 1927. Many of the leaders of the national freedom movement were involved in the activities and functioning of the AICTU.

In 1920, Gandhiji had formed the Textile Labour Association for satisfying the demands of spinners and weavers group. The Trade Union Movement in India slowly got powerful and took the shape of a national organization in foremost period in form of strikes, gheraos, boycotts, etc. for the stoppage and settlement of industrial complaints. In 1921, Mr. N.M. Joshi who was the General Secretary of All India Trade Union Congress during that time had moved a resolution in the Central Legislative

Assembly. In that resolution he recommended that the Government should introduce legislation for the registration and protection of the Trade Union's existence in India.

Many leaders of communist party were arrested and legal action were taken against them for their aggressive and lengthy strikes in 1924. This period also observed the beginning of militant trade union ideology in India as discussed earlier. This period saw the number of associations of the Indian working classes including the Peasants Party getting united and collectively demanded the Indian government there rights through the AITUC. They collectively pressurized the government bring an act to safeguard the interest of All India workers group. Their efforts lastly gave rise to the passing of the Trade Union Act 1926. Numerous Unions and Associations, like All India Trade Union Congress 1920, Red Trade Union Congress 1931, National Federation of Labour 1933, amalgamated with the AITUC in 1935. Later the Indian Federation of Labour in also merged in 1941.

With the advent of independent India in 1947 a new chapter began in the history of trade union and labour movement in India. This period saw the Governments making the team work with the unions for planned economic development. This period saw the politicization of the working class movement along the ideology of political parties. Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) became the trade union banner of the All India Congress Party. The AITUC became the trade union banner of the Communist Party of India. Later phases saw the workers, white-collar employees, supervisors, managers, teachers, etc. also getting organized by the trade unions for their rights and betterment.

The trade union movement in India, has progressed on the issues of various political, economic historical and industrial aspects. But, in general the unions in India have always remained under the power and control of political parties.

Conclusion

After the end of First World War, the trade union movement got strengthened and the management of trade unions was handed on from the influences of social workers into the influences of politicians. The Trade Union Act was passed in 1926 and a period of controlled trade unionism got underway. It was a chief law that provided legal position to the registered trade unions and gave them and their members a degree of protection from civil suits and criminal trials.

Trade Unions, all over India launched a series of strikes, demonstrations, rallies and protests for the plantation and mine labourers, railways and for textile mill workers from time to time. It resulted in improving the picture of trade unions in the minds of common people. The Act demonstrated as a blessing to trade unionism in India. A sequences of laws such as the Trade Union Act of 1926, which guaranteed the right to form a trade union and for Collective Bargaining, Industrial Disputes Act of 1948, etc also have been ratified from time to time.

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