

CHAPTER - XI

THE ROLE OF TRADE UNION IN THE UNORGANISED SECTOR :

A Case Study of West Dinajpur

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11.1.1 Though unorganised workers form an important segment in the total workforce, but they are not enjoying certain facilities, as are enjoying their counterparts in the organised sector. With the result they face certain problems. The legislative measures are not adequate to protect and promote their interest. In this chapter, it is attempted to examine the relevance of trade unionism in unorganised sector; the problems of unionism in this sector with reference to the cotton handloom weavers.

11.1.2 The trade union : A Trade Union, as defined in the Indian Trade Union Act, 1926 means "any combination, whether temporary or permanent formed primarily for the purpose of regulating 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". This is no doubt a broad definition. This wide meaning of trade union is sure to create confusion in the usual meaning in which it is generally understood, as an association of 'SRAMIK' (workers) to fight against the 'MALIK' (employers) to save the interest of Sramik.¹

11.1.3 Trade Union of workers is the outcome of the modern factory system, where production is carried on a large scale basis under the doctrine of laissez faire economy and large number of workers employed in a single factory. The Marxist approach views trade unionism as the instrument for the complete displacement of the capitalists both in Government and industry by its revolutionary programme.² The Webbs³ were the spokesmen of a non-

revolutionary theory of trade unionism. They argued that trade unionism "is not merely an incident of the present phase of capitalist industry, but has a permanent function to fulfil in the democratic state". Reflecting the changing attitude of Americans towards unions with the process of their growth and modification in their goals and policies, Selig Perlman⁴ observed that trade union is essentially pragmatic and struggles constantly for the betterment of the economic conditions and relationships through broad schemes of social and economic reforms. Hoxie⁵ also found trade unionism essentially pragmatic and non-revolutionary in its functioning. To Tannenbaum⁶, the main characteristic of unionism is its lack of ideology and its concentration on immediate ends. Gandhian approach view trade unionism as essentially reformist organisation and economic institution to promote class-collaboration and harmony as "Capital and Labour". Many recent studies have however, sought to check various theories in terms of stated reasons of union members for their participation.⁷

Here we are not interested in the theories or role or objectives of trade unions in organised sector, rather we want to know, what role being played or can be played by the Trade Union in unorganised sector.

We have already noted that the trade union movement got strength in organised sector, since there exist clear 'Sramik-Malik' relationship. But in unorganised sector,

specially where production is carried on household basis, i.e. where 'Sramik' is 'Malik', the position of Trade Union is peculiar. Prior to 1978 little or no attention was given by the trade unions in India to the vast workers operating in unorganised sector, the numerical strength of whom is ten times more than that of organised sector. Indian trade union movement was restricted to only in organised sector. Even in organised sector the progress and role of trade unions were unsatisfactory. To quote the CPI (M) - dominated CITU leader, Mr. Manoranjan Roy, "a large section of working force is uncovered by trade unions⁸ It was for the first time in August 1978, Central Government of India has cared to give due thought to the question of development of organisations amongst the unorganised rural workers, particularly agricultural labourers and then after a long time of trade unionism in 1986. CITU declared to be in operation in unorganised sector. In unorganised sector trade unions have a lot of things to do, but not in traditional sense of trade unionism function. A study conducted by Krishnamurty⁹ and others ends with the conclusion that "This sad state of affairs calls for the attention and initiative of all the concerned. The remedial measures to protect the workers in unorganised sector and to fulfil their basic needs at par with organised workers, should be initiated early."

11.1.4 In unorganised sector, there exist parties other than Sramik, who are directly or indirectly controlling favourably or unfavourably the interest of Sramik (artisans), e.g. in handloom industry, the parties other than the weavers are :- the mahajans - purchasing finished goods; supplying

raw-materials, supply credit - both in cash and in kind; the Government - regulating price of yarn and counter part of handloom i.e. powerloom; the Development agencies of government - to implement government policies in proper time, and at right place; the Bank - who are supposed to supply finance; and others ancilliary organisation. In NHHI sector, where production is carried on by hired artisans, there exist 'Sramik-Malik' relationship.

The objectives, of the parties as pointed out above, are conflicting and here a cycle of exploitation operating in such a way, that the unorganised producers failed to fight against them.

So to save the interest, the artisans themselves have to be organised to come out of the cycle of exploitation.

11.2.1 ROLE OF TRADE UNION IN UNORGANISED SECTOR :

In our present study (Handloom Industry), let us know, what Trade Union can do (?). We have already came across the information that :

- * the weavers and their families engaged in this industry are numerous and poor;
- * they are illiterate;
- * they are, for a long time, being sweated by the Mahajans;
- * they are mostly suffering from lack of finance and high price of raw-materials;
- * there are banks and they have policies, specifically designed to finance small artisans;

- * there are developmental agencies of the government and also the policies for upliftment of the condition of artisans; and
- * above all there is Government, who is responsible to look after the interest of poor millions.

Under the above circumstances, the Trade Union can :-

- * organise the scattered artisans;
- * educate the artisans about Government policies; bank facilities; the activities of developmental agencies.
- * fight jointly against the Mahajans;
- * educate the artisans about the utility of forming co-operative;
- * take leadership in forming co-operative;
- * jointly organise co-operative marketing society for marketing their small products;
- * build up raw-materials bank;
- * move jointly against the Government machineries;
- * organise movement for greater protection;
- * establish link with the organisations of other districts and states;
- * uphold the demand of the artisans before the Government and mass people; and last by not the least;
- * save the interest of artisans working in non-household sector.

But trade union movement in unorganised sector is very difficult and sometimes become invain.¹⁰ The problems that

one faced in organising the artisans/workers in unorganised sector are :

- * Scattered distribution of artisans; hence communication difficulties;
- * Heterogeneity of work, hence lack of common interest;
- * Ignorance of artisans/workers/craftsmen;
- * Lack of time on the part of artisans;
- * Non-enforcement of labour laws;
- * Lack of union culture and
- * Lack of proper leadership.

The problems of Trade Unionism in informal sector (unorganised) has been hinted upon by a number of studies. Indian Statistical Institute (in a study) observed the superior bargaining position of the formal sector units vis-avis the informal sector units. They have found that in almost all cases the raw-material is provided by the big industries and the final product of the informal sector is bought by them. This solves the marketing uncertainty of the informal sector units. But they lose almost all control over pricing of their products. It is more or less fixed by the big industries. As a result there is little bargaining capacity lies with informal sector workers.

Another study by HARRIS-TODARO considered the migration equation of workers in un-organised sector. According to them, migrants, who constitute the majority of workforce in urban unorganised sector, primarily aimed

at job in organised sector. As a result, their involvement in unorganised sector is a temporary phenomena. Hence little scope for Unionism.

A study by DATTA-CHOUDHURY¹¹ reveals that the existence of the unorganised sector depends upon the mercy of organised sector. They have shown that $W_z < W_r$ always. Where W_z is ununionised wage rate and W_r is the Unionised wage rate of formal sector. As a result of unionised force of formal sector, union movement in informal sector cannot be strong.

11.3.1 TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF WEST DINAJPUR, WITH REFERENCE TO THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY :

An intensive survey of the trade unions, carried out in the district of West Dinajpur, in the region having concentration of weavers, namely Gangarampore, Banshihari, Raiganj, Hemtabad, Itahar, and Karandighi. We have come across the information that prior to 1972, there was no union of weavers that operated in the district of West Dinajpur. However, there was Union of Beedi workers (1956) and other Majdurs (workers) named 'MAZDUR UNION'. The first Union of weavers, namely 'Gangarampur Tat Sramik Sangathan' came into existence in 1972, with its 6 branches in village areas around Gangarampur, under the leadership of U.T.U.C. (United Trade Union Congress) of R.S.P. (Revolutionary Socialist Party). Another Union namely "ITAHAR THANA TAT BASTRA UTPADAK SAMITI" established in 1974 under the leadership of C.I.T.U. (formerly AITUC) led by Communist (Marxist) Party of India, with its four branches in Raiganj Sub-Division. Later on during 1980 one more Union namely, 'Raiganj Sub-Divisional Weavers' Union was formed under leadership of I.N.T.U.C. led by Congress.

Besides these Unions, there were "SILPI SANGHA" in villages having concentration of weavers family. The membership of these Unions during last few years were as follows :-

Table T 11.3.1

Year	Gangaram- pore Tat Sramik Sangathan (UTUC)	Itahar Tat Bastra Utpadak Samity (CITU)	Raiganj Sub- Division Weavers Society (INTUC)	TOTAL	% of total weavers
1972	25	-	-	25	1.0%
1976	125	40	-	165	3.5%
1980	650	140	50	840	17.0%
1986	2050	890	425	3365	42.6%

Source - Field Survey.

It appears from the above data that increasingly the weavers are organising themselves under a common shed. But the growth in membership does not show any positive attitude of weavers towards the Union.

11.3.2 As regards to the activity of these Unions we have very little to say. So far as information collected Trade Unions are increasingly concerned with organising of co-operative society. The co-operatives established under their leadership upto 31 March 1986 were as follows :-

Name of Union	No. of Co-operatives
U.T.U.C.	9
C.I.T.U.	5
I.N.T.U.C.	3
Total	17

Source : Field Survey.

It seems that Trade Union movement is very much useful particularly in Co-operative movement in unorganised sector.

Among the other activities they select the artisans for training (under E.D.P.), move to Banks for loan and create pressure on the apex body of Co-operatives, namely, West Bengal State Weavers' Co-operative Society and National Handloom and Powerloom Development Corporation for regular supply of raw-materials, release of funds, establishment of branches and retail outlets etc.

No activity of the Unions reported to have taken venture for establishment of raw-materials bank or handloom marketing society. To uplift the condition of weavers and also for other entrepreneurs in unorganised sector, the role of Panchayets is worth mentioning. The Panchayet not only assists in forming Co-operatives but also takes measures and consults the appropriate authorities for development and expansion of cottage industries in rural sector.

11.4.1 SUMMARY :

From the above study, we may conclude that the Trade Unions and Panchayets have a unique role in mobilising the potential of rural entrepreneurs in unorganised sector and government policies can be successfully implemented through Trade Unions and Panchayets.

References & Notes

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2. Lozevsky A. - Marx and Trade Union.
3. Sidney & Webb - Industrial democracy.
4. Selig Perlman - A Theory of Labour Movement (1949)
5. Hoxie F.R. - Trade Unionism in the United States(1923)
6. Tannenbaum F. - A Philosophy of Labour.
7. Giri V. V. - Labour Problems in Indian Industry.
8. The Statesman - Calcutta September 17, 1971.
9. Shakhnaraiah, Srinivas and Krishnamurty A. - Problems of unorganised workers - Indian Journal of Commerce Part No. 142 1985.
10. Ibid.
11. Datta-Choudhury- A link between formal and informal sector.
12. The Unions as stated were not registered. They were informally connected with their master bodies. There was no policy of any trade union to operate in unorganised sector. It is the CITU, who declared in a report in 1986 to include unorganised sector within the perview of their activities and then Central Government has declared that the unorganised workers, should be organised (1988).