

EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION TOWARDS WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNIONISM

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Abstract: This paper has made an attempt to study employees' perception towards women participation in trade unionism in the state of Odisha, India. The findings in this paper are based on a survey conducted on trade union activists in the eastern part of India in the state of Odisha. The survey tries to comprehend the perception of unionised employees about the status of women in trade unions and their future. The study covers three important aspects of women participation in trade unionism. These are present status of women in trade unionism, obstacles in women participation in trade unionism and ways to encourage women participation in trade unionism. It was found that domestic/family burden was found to be the major obstacle for women participation. Developing union consciousness was perceived to be the most important mode to encourage female participation in TUs.

Key Words: Trade Unionism, Women, Trade Union Movement, Participation, Perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are under represented in the unions with an approximate share of eight percent in total membership. This is substantially below women's share of formal sector employment, which is about 25 percent. There is need for a long-standing commitment to mobilize women for trade unions participation, to encourage them to take leadership positions so that the concerns of female members can be effectively articulated, and policies to deal with women's concerns. In accordance with this commitment, many trade unions have established a women's wing in various national trade union federations in India. The policy makers should have the conviction that "the integration of women and achievement of gender equality are matters of human rights and a condition for social justice which should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue."

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Off late considerable emphasis has been placed on increasing the involvement of women in decision making in all the structures of the trade union. AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS & INTUC have established a women's wing, which deals with gender issues. Until the beginning of 2001 only twice and only in one national centre- Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), which is not affiliated to any political party- the union is led by women. It is high time to think seriously the inclusion of women in the negotiating committees to ensure that the peculiar problems of female employees are taken into account in negotiations. But the thinking is yet to be embraced by all the national federations in India. Various training programmes should be arranged for women organizers as well as rank-and-file members.

The grooming of female members to assume leadership positions will help raise the image and will strengthen the trade union movements. It is also true, however, that there has been some pressure from the international trade unions secretariats (ITS), to which some of the unions are affiliated, for unions to include women in decision-making positions. Some ITS are said to have made this a condition for their unions to benefit from programmes which they sponsor. This pressure or encouragement from outside has been useful but still substantial problems militating against women's active involvement in union work. Some of the problems identified include; lack of knowledge about unions on the part of women; difficulty in combining union work with family responsibilities; lack of confidence and unwillingness to compete against men in elections; and preference for men during elections to union offices. Women's organizations in unorganised sectors in India have been making efforts to improve the economic and social status of women. A large part of this drive has centred on encouraging the education of women at all levels and countering the social attitudes towards women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Approximately eight percent of the 38 million workforces in India is unionized. Women account for a miniscule fraction of trade union membership. There are sectoral variations in the pattern of women's membership in trade unions. Overall, membership may be between 5-20 percent. Women's participation rate in employment is very low at 22 percent. But it is not so in unorganised sector occupations as majority of workers in unorganized sectors are women. Most of the industries where females outnumber males are in relatively low paying sectors/occupations with very limited opportunities for career advancement. For a vast majority, even now the women's job and career is largely a function of male preferences and family circumstances.

Representation of women in formal/organised sector occupation is very low. Majority of women employees in India are engaged in informal sectors job where there is no clear employer-employee relationship. In 2000, some of the national trade union centres in India have announced that if their affiliates send nominations for representations at various level of decision making in union hierarchy without a

women's member in the panel, they will not consider the entire panel suggested by them. The incidence of union membership and union leadership among women is higher in certain occupation than others. In garments, the proportion of women to total members could be up to 70 percent. In plantations, hospitals, hotels, telecommunication and public service, women occupy positions as joint secretary/secretary. In teaching and nursing they hold even higher positions.

Women leader who won international fame for organising the unorganised sector women is Ela Bhatt. She started this activities while part of Ahemadabad Textile Industry and in view of the difficulties she had to face within the traditional union movement to espouse the cause of self employed women, she founded an organisation called Self Employed Women Association (SEWA). Her contribution to the labour movement was recognised by government was appointed as Chairperson of National Commission of Women and member of 2nd National Commission on Labour. On similar lines Jaya Arunachalam has organised self-employed and unorganised sector women in four southern states, under the banner ,Working Women Forum (WWF).

Martens (1994, ILO) observed that India has long taken the lead in organising women in informal sector. At the sectoral level except in teaching and nursing where women are represented in large numbers it is unusual to find a woman as president or general secretary. Even the Nurses association for many years led by a male person. Even when some women were given office bearer positions in railway workers union, the union is still called as 'Railwaysmen Union'. Fewer women join trade unions and the few who join never participate in trade union activities in India. In several programmes organised by ILO and other international bodies ask for gender balance in nomination. Still it is a rare phenomenon to send women nomination by Indian trade unions. Thus trade unions in India generally considered to be men's affairs in India.

Participation of women in Indian trade union is very low due to several reasons. Family responsibilities, traditional roles and stereotypes, job segregation in work places, and the male dominated trade union environments. According to one survey over 200 collective agreement signed by nearly 1800 trade union leaders revealed that less than five out of 1800 were women trade union leaders who participated and signatories to agreements (Venkatratnam, 2001). Unionisation density and representation in highest decision making roles is low among women not only in India but in most part of the world. The percentage of women members in trade unions that submit returns rose from 7.3 per cent in 1951-52 to 10.3 per cent in 1985; in 1992 it was 11.6 per cent. Detailed information on the extent of unionization among women workers is not available, although there are rich case studies of specific sectors/industries where women workers form a substantial section of the workforce.

Deshpande and Deshpande (1992, p. 1998) assessed the short-run impact of liberalization on female employment and participation. They found that: (a) in urban areas, both male and female participation rates increased after liberalization; (b) gender-based wage differentials widened among regular wage/salaried rural and urban

workers; (c) women workers were increasingly taking to self-employment and to the informal sectors as their proportion in manufacturing declined even though women's share in the urban workforce rose slightly.

Banerjee (1997) argues that in India the reverse has taken place: women's opportunities in the secondary sectors have fallen drastically in all states. However, there has been a slight increase in work opportunities for rural women in agriculture and some gains were made in the tertiary sector. According to Banerjee (1997, p. 433), it would be unrealistic to expect a "mechanical reproduction of international trends in a country the size of India". Women workers account for only 17 per cent of the manufacturing workforce that in turn is only 13 per cent of the total workforce. She goes on to suggest that even if the entire export sector (commodities) were staffed by women, "it is doubtful that this would result in a feminization of the Indian manufacturing workforce as a whole". Given that a substantial section of women workers in India today are engaged as "home-workers" in several industries (such as bangle makers, cobblers, dye makers, flower workers, kite makers, lace makers, leather workers, etc.), it is encouraging that the Indian trade union movement, under the leadership of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has taken a lead in drafting an ILO convention on home-workers (Mukul, 1998). A bill was introduced in the upper house in 1988 that attempted to equalize treatment of home-workers with other wage earners in terms of remuneration, health and safety, minimum wage and maternity protection, with tripartite boards as the enforcement mechanism. Although the bill was dropped, it did contribute to initiating a national debate, according to Ela Bhatt, general secretary of the SEWA (Mukul, 1998, p. 758). The SEWA model, where poor working women in the informal sector are organized so as to improve their wages and working conditions, and also assisted with credit from banks and cooperatives, needs to be replicated elsewhere in India with considerable urgency. This is already happening in the *Working Women's Forum* in Chennai and *Annapurna* in Mumbai. Established trade union federations have to take a lead in fostering these organizational models and cooperating with local NGOs where the situation warrants, especially in states where gender equality is a serious problem (Seeta Prabhu et al., 1996). The CITU has made considerable progress in organizing women workers in the informal sector. Trade unions should lobby central and state governments to improve education for women and increase state intervention in favour of women's employment. There is also considerable scope for increasing the number of women in leadership roles within the established trade union federations.

3. OBJECTIVES

This paper focuses on the perception of unionised employees towards the women participation in trade unions in the state of Odisha, India. The paper specifically tries to study the following objectives;

1. To study the perception of employees' towards women's participation in trade union.

2. To study the obstacles in way of women's participation in trade union.
3. To study the ways of encouraging women's participation in trade unions.

4. METHODOLOGY

Keeping the above aspects in view, the researchers had distributed questionnaire to ascertain what they perceive about the present status and future of women participation in trade unionism in Odisha. Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. Employees who are the trade union members belonging to three organisations namely NALCO, OMC, OPTCL constituted the primary sources. The secondary sources include files, records and documents of these organisations along with the Odisha State labour department. The sample respondents - 306, drawn from the three union intensive organisation of Odisha through purposive random sampling method. The data were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. The descriptive analysis of data is done with the help of SPSS package.

5. ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

NALCO, truly and national venture to take the country forwarding the world aluminium market, a unique product of judicious deliberations and prudent planning gets incorporated in 1981, as a public sector enterprise of the government of India. National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) is Asia's largest integrated aluminium complex, encompassing bauxite mining, alumina refining, aluminium smelting and casting, power generation, rail and port operations. About 7426 persons possessing a variety of skills, qualifications and competence are at the services of NALCO. NALCO is truly youthful with the average age of the employees being below 40yrs. Starting with a core group of 262 employees in 1982, the progressive growth in manpower has taken place in a planned manner matching the needs of the different stages of the project. At present number of executives and number of non-executives are working in NALCO.

Odisha Mining Corporation Limited (OMC) was born on 16th May' 1956 as a joint venture Company of Govt. of Odisha and Govt. of India to explore and harness mineral wealth of the State of Odisha and make value addition. It was the first Public Sector Undertaking in the Mining sector in India. Subsequently on 17th Nov' 1961, OMC became a wholly State-owned Corporation of Govt. of Odisha. OMC has a large fleet of human resources (3219) for carrying out its activities. At present there are executives and non-executives are working in OMC.

OPTCL is one of the largest Transmission Utility in the country was incorporated in March 2004 under the Companies Act, 1956 as a company wholly owned by Govt. of Odisha to undertake the business of transmission and wheeling of electricity in the state. At present there are executives and non-executives are working in OPTCL.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study deals with the perceptions of unionised employees about women participation in trade unions. The questionnaire was given to about 400 unionised employees out of which 306 responded. The questionnaire consisted of mainly three parts: preliminary information, perception towards women participation in trade unions, obstacles in the way of women leadership in TU and encouragement of women leadership.

6.1. Sample Characteristics

The Table 1 shows the characteristics of sample respondents. The age of the sample is not evenly distributed. The majority (43%) of respondents belong to (50yrs and above),

Table 1: Sample Characteristics: Distribution of Respondents according to Demographic Variables (N = 306)

Sl. No.	Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	20-29 yrs	31	10.1
		30-39 YRS	34	11.1
		40-49 yrs	109	35.6
		50 yrs and above	132	43.1
2	Marital Status	Married	296	96.7
		Unmarried	10	3.3
3	Education	Matriculation	62	20.3
		Higher Secondary	26	8.5
		Graduation	95	31.0
		PG	121	39.5
4	Qualification	General	226	73.9
		Technical	80	26.1
5	Background	Rural	125	40.8
		Semi-urban	77	25.2
		Urban	104	34.0
6	Language	Mother tongue	261	85.3
		Other languages known	12	3.9
		Language commonly used for trade union activities	30	9.8
7	Membership	Ordinary	166	54.2
		T U Activists	136	44.4
9	Duration of Association	Less than 5yrs	27	8.8
		5-9yrs	63	20.6
		10-19 yrs	96	31.4
		20-29yrs	70	22.9
10	Holding of union Office		50	16.3
		Without any office	7	2.3
		Members of the executive body	71	23.2
		Office bearer	227	74.2
11	Gender	Male	300	98.0
		Female	6	2.0
12	Organisation	NALCO	166	54.2
		OMC	96	31.4
		OPTCL	44	14.4

followed by (35.6%) belong to (40- 49yrs) and (11.1%) belong to 30-39 years and (10.1%) belong to (20-29) yrs. So mostly older people are the respondents working in these organisations. Majority (96.7%) of the respondents are married. Majority of the respondents (39.5%) are post graduate followed by (31.0%) graduates followed by (20.3%) are matriculate. Almost 74% respondents are from non-technical background whereas only 26% respondents are technically qualified. Majority of respondents (40.8%) are from rural background followed by 34% and 25.2% from urban and semi-urban background. 85.3 % respondents to communicate using mother tongue. 54.2% respondents are ordinary members of the union where as 44.4 % are trade union activist. Duration of association with trade unions is evenly distributed among the sample. Majority (74.2) of the respondents are not holding any official position in unions where as 23.2% respondents are working as office bearers of unions. Majority (98%) respondents are males. Majority (54.2 %) of respondents are drawn from NALCO, followed by 31.4% from OMC and 14.4% from OPTCL.

6.2. Descriptive Analysis (Perception of the sample respondents about women participation in TU)

Majority of respondents preferred women leadership in trade unions. The question of equality of women is one of the most important issues before the working class movement today. Nearly 55 percent of respondents believed it is a very tough task to hold leadership position by a woman where as 41 percent perceived it is not too tough. Most of the respondents support encouragement of female participation in trade union. Women have an important role in Trade Unions. Their participation is vital not only as part of working class but also in the Democratic movement. They add new dimensions to the struggles. Once they are convinced and motivated their participation is total and militant. Women become loyal members of the Unions if their specific issues are taken and some gains are achieved through struggles. Women workers are ready to make any sacrifices needed for their struggles and they also have a clear

Table 2
Opinion on perception of the sample respondents about women participation in TU

<i>Sl. No. Items</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1. Preference for women leadership in trade unions	yes	246	80.4
	no	60	19.6
2. It is a tough task to hold leadership position by women	Very tough	59	19.3
	Tough	109	35.6
	Not too tough	69	22.5
	Not tough	57	18.6
	Cannot say	12	3.9
3. Encourage female participation in trade union	Strongly Agree	117	38.2
	Agree	152	49.7
	Cannot say	8	2.6
	Disagree	22	7.2
	Strongly Disagree	7	2.3

vision of Rights and Wrongs. They are morally very strong and do not easily back out from struggles. The Trade Union Movement and Working women's Movement have achieved many things through their struggles such as equal remuneration, Maternity benefits, no deployment in night shift, provisions of Crèche, rest rooms, an act against Sexual Harassment at workplace etc.

6.3. Major obstacles for the women participation in trade unions

Domestic/family burden was found to be the major obstacle for women participation. It is a fact. It can be reduced through real education. All the people have to be very much broad minded to support women for their progressive contribution towards trade unions as well as in other areas too.

Male domination was ranked second by the respondents. This was the main hindrance which was prevalent in earlier times. But, now the scenario is started changing. Cooperation is required among all for a better society, developed country and a prospering world. Because the reality is that all are equal. No one is superior and no one is inferior. The victory mantra should be allowing and helping the weaker people to go ahead and not by dominating them. By dominating we will be losers and by giving chances to others we will be winners in the process of nation building.

Lack of confidence on trade union was given lowest rank. To bring confidence on trade union activities, all have to at least make strong effort to perform their duties smoothly and in well manner in every respect. Individual and organisational goal achievement would be easier by the proper implementation of trade union activities as a result of which people will have faith on trade unions and their participants.

Table 3
Ranking of Major obstacles for the women participation in trade unions

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Rank</i>
a.	male domination	2.3693	2
b.	domestic/family burden	1.8954	1
c.	social discrimination	2.9248	3
d.	lack of co-operation from male union leaders	3.5654	4
e.	lack of confidence on trade union	4.2320	5

6.4. Ways of Encouraging Female Participation in Trade Unions

Respondents were asked about the ways of encouraging female participation in trade union. Developing union consciousness was perceived to be the most important mode to encourage female participation in TUs. Attitudinal Change in male leaders towards women participation was given second rank. Helping in developing leadership skill ranked third by respondents. Establishment of women wing in trade union was least preferred by respondents.

Table 4
Ranking of Ways of Encouraging Female Participation in Trade Unions

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Rank</i>
a.	develop union consciousness/awareness among women workers	2.4673	1
b.	attitudinal change in male leaders towards women participation	3.3464	2
c.	help in developing effective leadership skill	3.4183	3
d.	help in building confidence among them	3.4542	4
e.	equal treatment to both for leadership position	4.0196	5
f.	establishing women wing in the trade union	4.3399	6

6.5. F Statistics for perception of Women Leadership with Demographic Factors

To find out the differences in opinion on the basis of demographic variables were significant or not one way anova was used.

Preference for women leadership differed significantly among respondents having different qualification, education, background, types of membership, duration of association with TU and organisation.

Respondents belongs to different age group, gender, organisation, membership and duration of association with TU differ significantly regarding their opinion that it is a tough task for a women to be a leader of a TU.

Respondents belongs to different age group, gender, organisation, education, qualification, background, type of office holding and duration of association with TU differ significantly regarding their opinion that women participation is very important.

Table 5
F Statistics for employee perception towards women participation in trade unionism

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Preference for Women Leadership</i>	<i>Tough for a women to be a leader</i>	<i>Importance of Women Participation</i>
1	Age	0.720(.541)	4.470(.004)	3.937(.009)
2	Marital Status	2.526(.113)	2.276(.132)	2.445(.119)
3	Education	6.141(.000)	1.903(.110)	10.628(.000)
4	Qualification	6.435(.012)	.045(.832)	7.430(.007)
5	Background	10.918(.000)	.002(.998)	24.854(.000)
6	Language	1.144(.332)	2.372(.070)	1.489(.218)
8	Member TU	3.294(.021)	2.850(.038)	.939(.422)
9	Associated TU	4.849(.001)	2.318(.057)	3.213(.013)
10	Hold Office	1.595(.205)	1.101(.334)	4.471(.012)
11	Gender	1.490(.223)	6.537(.011)	5.143(.024)
12	Organisation	6.699(.001)	3.001(.051)	5.335(.005)

7. CONCLUSION

Role of women in trade unions is ever relevant and very very important. But, less no. of women join trade unions and those who join do not participate actively in trade

union matters due to different obstacles. Social discrimination on the basis of gender is a major bottleneck in our country. Improvement, broad mindedness and forwardness take place due to awareness, education and in the reverse manner illiteracy leads towards narrow-mindedness and backwardness. There should not be any sort of discrimination in the society on any type of gender. Realizing the importance of education in true sense this social discrimination can be minimized. That is the need of the hour, the call to be reached, realized and most importantly to be understood by each and every person of the world. Lack of cooperation from male union leaders is a problem for women participation in trade union. It is so because of many factors like, male mentality, their jealousy, pressure of others and sometimes due to unavoidable circumstances. But all male counterparts are not equal. They vary from each other. There might be some deviations in some cases also. In some cases they might be more helpful and supportive. There is a need to develop union awareness among women workers, changing attitudes of male leaders towards women participation, there should be active efforts to develop effective leadership skill in women, helping women to be more confident, equal treatment to all and establishing the women wing in the trade unions so that they will be encouraged to participate in more numbers in making and contributing towards a better and developed India, a brightest part of the entire world.

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