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GENESIS OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN ' BOMBAY '



Kiran Daji Sawant

Abstract:- The paper seeks to highlight the origin of trade union movement in city of Bombay. The paper also takes into consideration that how the condition of the workers of Bombay was miserable, lived in the slums, work for fourteen to sixteen hours a day but paid meagerly. Thus they were exploited by the Capitalist. It also tries to highlight the contribution of M. N. Lokhande in the field of trade union in Bombay. At the end it also highlights on the introduction of several legislation and its impact on the workers of Bombay.

Keywords: Trade Union Movement , modern society , several legislation , Capitalist.

INTRODUCTION

The Industrial revolution which began in England soon spread to the other European countries of the world. It had brought the rise of two classes in the modern society: The bourgeoisie and the proletariat which appeared with their respective organisations on the global scene. The bourgeoisie organization began to utilize the labour force for their own interests. On the other hand workers also set up their own Trade Union associations to counter parts the moves of the bourgeoisie. This was the beginning of the Trade Union Movement. Now Trade Union Movement also resisted the oppression and exploitation of the so called 'Capitalists' class.

The term Trade union Movement was not used much before the Industrial Revolution. However, after the industrial revolution trade union started spreading not only in European countries but also started spreading in Asian and African countries. The trade union movement took definite shape in from the organization of the Labour Movement. Especially, in Bombay when the Mill workers of Bombay staged a strike in protest against the imprisonment of Lokmanya Tilak in 1908, Lenin greeted the emergence of "the Indian Proletariat" as "matured sufficiently to wage a class conscious and political mass struggle" which heralded the doom of the British rule in India. Thus Trade Union took its definite shape in Indian National Movement. At this juncture (before the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia) the Labour movement was led by "reformist leadership" which did everything to prevent the trade unions from becoming organs of class collaboration." It was only after the Russian revolution of 1917, Marxian became widely known in India and also emerged as influential factor in the trade union movement and then Trade Union took its definite shape in the freedom struggle of India. "The visible signs of this movement were the Trade unions, national federations, strikes boycotts, lock-outs, labour leaders, labour conferences and programmes" etc. worked as the powerful weapon in the hands of the working class in bringing about the social and political change in India.

What is Trade Union:

With the formation of trade unions, there began the efforts to define the scope and character of trade unions. However, while tracing and defining the origin of the Trade Unions, Mary Agnes Hamilton emphasized "Trade union is a labour movement emerged at a time, when Labour movements were unable to solve political, social problems of the wage earners. Trade unionism is a system of the wage earners. Trade Unionism is a system of protection, a means, whereby the strength of associated members is used to meet and offset the strength of money..... a trade union is like a bundle of sticks. Two workers are bond together and have strength of unity. They have the power of resistance.

David McClellan defines trade union in the following words, "Every trade union has the fundamental attributes of a movement and at the same time, it qualifies to be regarded as a social organization by virtue of its basic properties. In fact a trade union is unique because it combines the essential elements of both management and organization." Thus every trade union has certain aims and objectives which it tries to accomplish it in a given circumstances.

According to Pramod Verma, "The aim of the Trade unions is to prevent the level of wages from falling below the amount traditionally paid in the various branches of industry, and to prevent the price of labour power from falling below its value."

Formation of Trade Union:

The Trade unions were not a sudden phenomenon. It has historical process of the rise and development. Initially this trade and its transaction was managed and organized by the Guilds. However as the trade expanded it was find difficult for the Guilds to meet the vast problems aroused due to vast trade and commerce As a result of it Local Guilds disappeared and in place of that new Trade Unions were formed. This change was inevitable due to industrialization and the change in the system of production. However this change made it impossible for the workers to preserve their former working conditions which

they could have under the guild system. Under the industrial production, the workers had perforce to learn the new methods of organization.

When Trade Union started forming the individual workers started coming together and that changed the working class struggles qualitatively, both in the sense of class and mass struggle. In Western Countries, initially worker started helping to the Capitalist class in establishing the policy of free trade especially in England and soon also got involved in political stratagems of the time. The trade Union Movement got further impetus due to the Chartist Movement.

Establishment of modern industry in India was the origin of the working class movement in India. With the introduction of the Railway and factory system in Bombay and other parts of the country the modern working class emerged, which resulted into the growth of manufacturing, factory system and their resultant consequences in India were more or less similar to the development of European countries during the period of Industrial Revolution. The distinguishing factor was that the Indian working class had the advantage in the historical lesson of the world proletariate movement, This contributed to the development and spread and the growth of the trade union movement in India. According to the Pramod Verma, "The advent of the trade unionism in India could be traced to the early days of industrialization, beginning in the 1950's with the establishment of Cotton and jute mills in Bombay and Calcutta industries instead of bringing prosperity, to the workers, proved to detrimental to them."

In Bombay the Origin of the Trade Union goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. When Mill Workers of Bombay staged a strike in protest against the imprisonment of Lokmanya Tilak in 1908. At this time Lenin greeted the emergence of "the Indian Proletariat" as "matured sufficiently to wage a class conscious and political mass struggle" which heralded the doom of the British rule in India. However, the Continuous history of Trade union movement in real sense in India can be stressed out only after the First World War. Before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, in Russia the Trade union Movement in Bombay was led by "reformist leadership" they "did everything to prevent the trade unions from becoming the class struggle and turn them into organs of class collaboration."

Condition of Workers in Bombay:

The condition of the Industrial workers was beyond the endurance of normal human being, who lived in a catholic situation especially, the workers Bombay; who lived in slums or at the most one room accommodation without any facilities. In this context Mukhtar has stated that, The Indian factory labour lives in an atmosphere, which compared to that of England stinks of destitution, diseases and ignorance. He is under-fed, under-clothed and badly housed. His life is a continuous struggle against poverty especially in growing industrial areas like Bombay and Calcutta." And the working hours for these mill workers were more than twelve hours a day. However, the use of electricity especially in Bombay mills at the close of the nineteenth century made the working hours still longer. "It is a matter of common

knowledge that during the past few years, the use of electric light in Bombay mills have increased very much and the hours of labour have consequently been lengthened very considerably. Mills which formerly worked from sunrise to sunset now started with electric light at 5a.m. and work up to 8 p.m. and later..... but to use electric light to work a man, 15 to 16 hours a day to me absolutely wrong and inhuman act." The quite occasionally they worked even for fifteen to sixteen hours. However, they were paid very meagerly.

Payment of Workers:

There was a prevalent system in Bombay mills was to cut and aside some part of his or her wages as a security from each workers, so that he could not leave his job so easily or suddenly. So in a way it was an assurance of maintenance of good performance in mills.

Firstly, it was a guarantee against a worker with the employee from which recovery of fines for bad work, or some kind of damage on the part of the employee could be recovered. Secondly, It served as a guarantee in protecting the employee against strikes. This system was against the interest of the employee and afforded upper hand to the employer in controlling the worker. There were different types of wages were paid to the workers for e.g.

I) Time Rates: This system was set up on monthly calendar, but the wages were paid strictly according to actual days worked by the labourers. This system was employed in the department of blow room, mixing room, carding and spinning.

II) Piece Rates: This was a system in which a particular work was allotted to the worker and wages were paid according to the fixed piece of work. Women and children were paid accordingly.

Growth and Development of Trade Union Movement:

In the first quarter of the 19th Century Robert Owen, who tried to improve the conditions of the workers in England. On the similar line attempts were also made in India to improve the condition of labourers and workers. The fact is that the existing working conditions of the factory system shocked the some social minded employees. As a result several efforts were made to improve the condition of the workers and labourers which led to the introduction of several legislation acts in India such as Fatal Accident Act, Factory Act of 1881, Factory act of 1892, Workmen's Act of 1923 etc. this act helped to improve the status of workers also assured them the benefit of compensation in case of injury, etc. The Indian Trade Union Act of 1926 also assured the trade unions to register them legally. In future the Payment of Wages Act of 1936 and The Factory Act of 1948 assured them about their minimum wages and other facilities to the workers.

Thus the labour organizations were formed through the efforts of the social Reformers, who became conscious of the problems faced by the labour as a class. This movement was guided by the Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengalee. But Mr. Lokhande was supposed to be the first Indian who formed the labour organization known as "The Bombay Mill Hands Association" in 1890. This Historic incident gave the way for

the formation of other Labour organization.

The Bombay Mill-Hands Association was the first labour association in India that posed challenged to the mill owners. This was important because the mill hands were certainly slow to combine against their employers and the prevalence of the jobbers system in the Indian Mills discouraged the workers to look beyond their own mill, own interest and the closest colleagues on the factory floor. The advent of trade unionism in India means that the workers began to be aware of their legitimate rights and conscious of their socio-economic exploitation due to the colonial policy of the British government in India. This exploitation was at its worst by the beginning of the twentieth century, when not only in Bombay and in the country like India, But the whole world was subject to the exploitation at the hands of the Western imperialists.

The trade union movement in India could not so flourish unless there were substantial reasons for its growth. The basic cause of the growth of trade unions was socio-economic factor combined with the political awareness among the workers aggravated by the callous attitude of the British government. Beside this, there were several other factors like International Labour organization, The impact of the First World War, and The influence of Russian Revolution etc., marked the Trade Union movement to take the definite shape and achieve the success in true sense in Bombay and other places of India. Number of trade unions emerged in this city such as Girmi Kamgar Mahamandal (1923), The Bombay Textile Labour Union (1925), Girmi Kamgar Union (1928) etc. Thus within a short span Bombay became one of the important industrial centre in India. Trade union Movement gave a dynamic and vigorous support to all this workers and fought for their rights through strikes and morchas to press for the workers demands.

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