

Worker's Participation in Trade Union Activities: A case study with special reference to Oil India Limited, Duliajan, Assam

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ABSTRACT

Trade union is an organization whose membership consists of workers and union leaders, united to protect and promote their common interests. The principal purposes of Trade Union are to (1) negotiate wages and working condition terms, (2) regulate relations between workers (its members) and the employer, (3) take collective action to enforce the terms of collective bargaining, (4) raise new demands on behalf of its members, and (5) help settle their grievances. The main intension of this study is to access the extent of participation of workers in trade union activities with special reference to Oil India Limited, Duliajan, Assam. The present study is based on primary data collected from selected 150 respondents working in Oil India Limited, Duliajan, Assam through purposive sampling technique and interview schedule. Following are some of the important findings of the study: (1) Worker's participation in trade union activities is satisfactory (2) Workers feel pride in trade union activities (3) There is cordial relationship between management and workers in trade union activities.

Key words: Problems and prospects, Trade Union Activities, Worker's participation,

INTRODUCTION

The idea of workers' participation arose in Europe, where collective bargaining has usually been at the branch or industry level; this often left a gap of employee representation at the enterprise or plant level, which became filled by bodies such as works councils, works committees, enterprise committees and so forth. Many developing countries have also adopted legislative initiatives with a view to having works councils or similar structures set up (e.g.,

Pakistan, Thailand, and Zimbabwe) as a means of promoting labour-management cooperation. The relationship of these bodies to trade unions and collective bargaining has been the subject of considerable legislation and negotiation. This is reflected in a provision of the ILO Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135), which states that where both trade union representatives and elected representatives exist in the same undertaking, measures shall be taken

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to ensure that the existence of those representatives is not used to undermine the position of the trade union.

The concept of workers participation in India dates back to 1920 when Mahatma Gandhi had suggested that both the workers and management should share in the prosperity of the business. Employer should not regard sole owner of mills and factory of which they may be trustees. There should be a perfect relationship of friendship and cooperation among them. Capital and labour should be supplementary to each other. TISCO, Indian Aluminum works, Belur. The Delhi cloth and general mill ltd also introduced workers participation in management 1938. The Royal commissioner of labour (1929-31) recommended the formation of works committee which plays a useful part in Indian industrial system. Bombay Industrial Relations Act 1946 (apply to textile industries in Maharashtra and Gujarat), and ID Act 1947. Royal Commission also reported in general for works committee. The royal commission for labour also suggested that for cultivation of industrial harmony and avoiding misunderstanding and settling dispute. In the first five year plan it was suggested for constitution of joint committee for consultation at all level of management. ID Act 1947, joint management council 1957, the industrial policy resolution 1948. The 2nd 5yr plan explained the philosophy of worker-management relationship outlined that a socialist society is built up not solely on monetary incentives but on idea of service to the society. The creation of industrial democracy is therefore a prerequisite in the establishment of a socialist society. For the successful implementation of the plan, increased association of labour with management is necessary. Govt. of India set up a specific study group to see the progress

and problem in working of worker's participation in May 1957. The recommendations of the study group were accepted by 15th Indian labour conference in July 1957.

'Workers Participation' is considered as a process by which workers participate in management functions of planning, to organizing and controlling with the objective of better results and satisfaction. The move to associate workers in decision-making process of management has gradually been gaining momentum in India with the introduction of democratic institutions and spread of literacy among workers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Trade union is an organization or a group that workers join so that they can have their interests and goals well represented. Today, we live in a world where workers have assumed great importance. The employers have started to realize the importance of workers. The employees too have started to form Trade Unions to protect their interests. Bosses around the world have recognized that the best way to resolve issues is by way of dialogue. The employees have realized that to protect them from exploitation, unity is very important. This is one of the reasons why trade unions have become so important today. The studies of trade unions are necessary because of their demanding role for workers growth and development such as- (a) Obtaining satisfactory rates of pay (b) Protecting workers jobs, as it has been shown that union members are less likely to be dismissed (c) Securing adequate work facilities (d) Ensuring satisfactory work conditions, this can include areas such as health and safety and equal opportunities (e) Negotiating bonuses for achieving targets and Negotiating employment conditions and job descriptions. Lack of support

of trade union or defective trade unionism causes poor industrial relation and which in turn produces highly disquieting effects on the economic life of the country. Lack of coordination in trade union adversely affects the tempo of work. Costs build up. Absenteeism and labor turnover increase. Plants discipline breaks down and both the quantity and quality of production suffer. Dynamic industrial situation calls for change more or less continuously. Methods have to be improved. Economics have to be introduced. New products have to be designed, produced and put in the market. Each of these tasks involves a whole chain of proper planning, organizing, directing, controlling and coordinating the trade union activities. Every man comes to the work place not only to earn a living. He wants to satisfy his social needs also. When he finds difficulty in satisfying these needs he feels frustrated. Poor Industrial Relations take a heavy toll in terms of human frustration. For adequate functioning of industrial relation, trade unionism is one of the most important criteria. Besides these, lack of adequate structure and functions of trade union organization is also a direct source of poor industrial relations resulting in inefficiency and labour unrest. Management is not sufficiently concerned to ascertain the causes of inefficiency and unrest following the laissez-faire policy, until it is faced with strikes and more serious unrest. Even with regard to methods of work, management does not bother to devise the best method but leaves it mainly to the subordinates to work it out for themselves. Contempt on the part of the employers towards the workers is another major cause. However the causes of ineffective functioning of a working environment and industrial relation due to defects in trade unionism are (a) An intolerant attitude of contempt towards the

workers on the part of management (b) Inadequate fixation of wage or wage structure; (c) Unhealthy working conditions; (d) Indiscipline; (e) Lack of human relations skill on the part of supervisors and other managers; (f) Desire on the part of the workers for higher bonus and the corresponding desire of the employers to give as little as possible; (g) Inappropriate introduction of automation without providing the right climate; (h) Unduly heavy workloads; (i) Inadequate welfare facilities; (j) Dispute on sharing the gains of productivity; (k) Unfair labour practices, like victimization (l) Retrenchment, dismissals and lock-outs on the part of management and strikes on the part of the workers; (m) Inter-union rivalries; and (n) General economic and political environment, such as rising prices, strikes by others, and general indiscipline having their effect on the employees' attitudes.

In Oil India Ltd. (OIL), the environment of trade unionism have coming across simultaneously since the establishment of the company (1959). In 1962 the Indian Oil Workers Union (IOWU), Assam has been registered under the Indian Trade Union Act. On the other hand several other trade unions like Oil India Employees Union (OIEU), Assam Petroleum Mozdoor Union (AMPU) etc. have been playing significant role in Oil India Limited.

This particular oil industry is chosen because it is one of the largest organization and in one of the most profitable oil industry of Assam. Now a days OIL has been considered a Novaratna Public Sector Undertaking Company of India. It is very necessary to know in which way trade unionism have been moving. Because, as we know trade unions generally protect and promote the interest of wage earner. We believe that without knowing about the

trade unions no one can study about worker's problems. Apart from that it will be helpful for us to know about the work culture, workers employer's relations and other aspects of workers and management. So, a sociological study is very significant to find out the hidden truths which are associated with the trade unions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of this study:

1. To ascertain workers level of involvement in the decision making process of their work places;
2. To establish the general attitude of workers towards worker participation in management Decision making.
3. To suggest some practical approaches for effective participation of workers in trade union activities

METHODOLOGY

For this study, Survey Method is applied. This study is based on primary data source where the researcher conducted interviews for collecting necessary information from the respondents. Total 150 respondents are selected as the sample of the present study through purposive sampling and interview schedule working in Oil India Limited, Duliajan, Assam. Out of which 63 samples are regular workers and 87 workers selected who are working in contractual basis.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The following data analyzed on percentage basis showing the clear picture on workers participation in trade union activities. The following tables shows systematically the extent of participation in different dimensions.

Table 1. Percentage of Degree of Support of Workers satisfactory Participation by the Management

	Don't Support	Indifference	Support	Total No of Managers interviewed	Percentage of Support	Percentage of Indifference	Percentage of Support
Managerial Support	3	1	26	30	10%	3.33%	86.66%

On the basis of the above mentioned data of the table, it can be said that 86.66% of managers involved in trade union activities support their workers to participate equally with them, where 10% from that managerial group do not support in workers involvement in such activities. Interestingly, 3.33% of managers having indifference attitude regarding workers participation in trade union activities. This highlights that majority of the managers have positive attitude towards workers participation in trade unionism.

Table 2. Percentage of Workers Participating regularly or irregularly in Trade Union Activities

Total Regular Workers participated in trade union activities Surveyed	Total contractual Workers participated in trade union activities Surveyed	Total Workers (both contractual and regular workers) participated in trade union activities Surveyed	Percentage of Regular Workers participated in trade union activities Surveyed	Percentage of Contractual Workers participated in trade union activities Surveyed
87	63	150	58%	42%

The above mentioned data indicates that 58% of regular workers are participating in trade union activities whereas 42% of contractual workers are participating in trade union activities. This means the involvement of regular workers are more than contractual workers in union activities.

Table 3. Percentage of Workers having Regular or Irregular Trade Union Membership for Trade Union Activities

Surveyed Permanent Workers having trade union Membership	Surveyed Contractual Workers having trade union membership	Total number of Surveyed Workers (both Permanent and Contractual) Having trade union membership	Percentage of Surveyed permanent Workers having trade union Membership	Percentage of Surveyed Contractual Workers having trade union membership
55	42	97	56.70%	43.29%

Similarly, it was also observed that only 43.29% of contractual workers have trade union membership than the permanent workers having trade union membership (56.70%). This shows us a picture of better involvement of permanent workers than contractual workers in trade union activities.

Table 4. Percentage of the extent of Workers Participation in Trade Union Activities on the basis of Some Variables

Variables	Low/ Negligible Involvement	Average Involvement	High Involvement	Total Respondents Involved	Percentage of Low/Negligible Involvement	Percentage of Average Involvement	Percentage of High Involvement
AGE:							
20-30 Years	2	22	93	117	1.70%	18.80%	79.48%
31- 40 Years	4	5	11	20	20%	25%	55%
41-50 Years	1	2	3	6	16.66%	33.33%	50%
51- Above	2	2	3	7	28.57%	28.57%	42.85%
Total - 150							
SEX:							
Male	12	36	55	103	11.65%	34.95%	53.39%
Female	11	09	27	47	23.40%	19.14%	57.44%
Total- 150							

Contd....

LENGTH OF SERVICE:

Less than 1 year	4	0	31	37	10.81%	0%	83.37%
1 to 3 Years	10	1	33	44	22.72%	2.27%	75%
More than 3 Years	8	2	59	69	11.59%	2.89%	85.50%

Total- 150**EDUCATION**

Illiterate	1	3	0	4	25%	75%	0%
School Drop Outs	2	5	0	7	28.57%	71.42%	0%
Primary	1	9	0	10	10%	90%	0%
Secondary	4	8	0	12	33.33%	66.66%	0%
Higher Secondary	7	12	0	19	36.84%	63.15%	0%
Graduation	12	12	12	36	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%
Post Graduation	21	16	25	62	33.87%	25.80%	40.32%

Total- 150**NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT**

Irregular	2	4	57	63	3.17%	6.34%	90.47%
Regular	4	1	82	87	4.59%	1.14%	94.25%

Total- 150

The above mentioned table shows the distinct picture of workers involvement in union activities in different dimensions. If we compare the picture in a combined form, then it will be observed that percentage of high involvement is comparatively better in every dimension than percentage of low and average involvement of workers in union activities. If we notice some interesting figures, we will get that 79.48% of workers showing high involvement in union activities having the age group between 20-30 years. Again 83.37% of workers showing high involvement in union activities with only one year of service experience and 85.50% of workers showing more involvement in union activities having 3 years of working experience. This

clearly shows that for participation in union activities, experience matters. Similarly in case of sex dimension, the involvement of female (57.44%) is better than male (53.39%). Level of education is also a factor of effective workers participation in union activities where except graduate and post graduate worker, others have zero involvement in union activities due to lack of knowledge and experience. In nature of employment, it was also observed that the nature of involvement of regular workers (94.25%) is better than the irregular workers (90.47%). Although the difference is negligible. Both regular and irregular workers having strong motivation for high level involvement in union activities.

Table 5. Percentage of Workers Involvement in Decision Making Process

Frequency of Involvement	Total Number	Percentage of Involvement
Not at all	5	3.33%
Occasionally	17	11.33%
Often	128	85.33%
Total	150	

From this study, it was also observed that majority of the workers are participating often in decision making process (85.33%). Only 3.33% of workers are not all involved in decision making process. This highlights that the level of participation is satisfactory.

Table 6. Opinion of Workers in the following areas related with Trade Union Activities

Areas Related with Trade Union Activities	'YES' Group	'NO' Group	Total Respondents (Both from 'Yes' and 'No' Group)	Percentage of 'YES' Group	Percentage of 'NO' Group
Any practical seminar, workshop or training course attended on workers participation in trade union activities	85	65	150	56.66%	43.33%
on line training is better than face to face training for workers participation in management	51	99	150	34%	66%
Equal treatment from the management irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex and social status.	103	47	150	68.66%	31.33%
Having a cordial relationship between workers and managers	115	35	150	76.66%	23.33%
Having a cordial relationship between senior level managers with junior level managers	125	25	150	83.33%	16.66%
New developments in trade unionism must be accepted by the workers although it may increase their work load.	114	36	150	76%	24%

Table 6 showing the workers opinion. 66% of union workers prefer face to face training than online training on trade union management. 76.66% of workers said that they are having cordinal relationship between workers and managers. Interestingly, 83.33% of workers said about positive cordial level relationship between junior level managers with their senior level managers. This shows a healthy environment and good working condition of trade union workers.

SUGGESTIONS OF SOME PRACTICAL APPROACHES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WORKERS IN UNION ACTIVITIES:

For effective functioning of trade union activities, both managers and the workers must share a good working conditions. Some practical approaches can be adopted like (a) Both parties should have a genuine faith in the system and in each other and be willing to work together. It should be based on mutual trust (b) Participation should be real (c) The issues related to increase in production and productivity, evaluation of costs, development of personnel, and expansion of markets should also be brought under the jurisdiction of the participating bodies. (d) Congenial work environment (e) Well defined roles (f) Faith in the efficacy of the scheme (g) Wide publicity (h) Should be evolutionary (i) Free flow of information throughout the enterprise (j) Decisions taken by different participatory forums must be sincerely carried out in the stipulated time Participation must work as complementary body to help collective bargaining and so on.

CONCLUSION

We believe that workers' participation in management and decision-making processes

in enterprise or plant levels has good impacts in several issues including the improvement in working conditions. We feel that the demand for participation in management is to be raised in order to bring about transparency in managerial activities and decision-making process, which will enhance a fair sharing of gains. It will strengthen workers' psychology as labour investors of equal status and will produce positive results in terms of higher and higher productivity. However, these possibilities depend on attitudinal changes in employers and effective workers' education. Only then can industrial democracy and labour-management cooperation be pushed to a new height towards desirable horizon. Proper planning, organizing, directing, controlling and coordinating at all levels of management is necessary for effective workers participation in union activities. Then only we can think about improved level of workers participation in union activities.

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