



Consequence of Unionization on Employee Performance in Manufacturing Industry in West Bengal, India : A Case Study During Covid Era.

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Abstract :

In manufacturing industry Trade Union always plays an important role concerning the employers and employees. Major disputes and downfalls in industrial organizations occur due to union activities. The main theme of this study is to sort out the consequences of trade unionism on workers performance in West Bengal and to some extent in the context of Covid pandemic. The first and foremost objective is to identify how the unionization influences rather effects on workers performance and how the unionization make benefit for its members . Moreover, it also aims to identify the major issues relating to observe the healthy ambience and status in between working of trade unions and managerial authority including workers association and ways in settling the conflicts on various issues . Relationship between the labour unions and workers remains dynamic in India since independence. It also tries to realise the theories concerning introduction and role of Trade union and industrial relation in manufacturing units of India. Tata Metaliks Limited and Tata Bearings, Kharagpore, West Bengal, are forerunner in the aforementioned industrial domain and enjoys the status of being listed companies in Indian stock exchanges. These organisations recognise two politically affiliated trade unions that are effectively involved in maintenance of industrial relations in the said organisations. This study is focused on understanding the role of these trade unions in benefiting the workforce according to their perception. For achieving the success of this study, both the qualitative as well as quantitative research methods have been adopted. Questionnaire taken for study emphasised several factors viz. Decision making, Rational feedback mechanism, Healthy electioneering process, betterment of job condition and improvement of workers performance, Membership services, and Accountability . Personal interviews and questionnaire were used in building up this research work. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed ended questions. After making a detailed literature review in depth, a non-probability random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The empirical study was conducted by sending out a questionnaire to a sample of 1000 members of two Trade Unions of the concerned companies, out of which 200 responded, making the respond rate of 20 % . The findings indicate that both the trade unions have an active role in maintaining the quality life of the workers and its members also believe that by joining the unions interests of wage earners are promoted effectively. Practically it shows that there is strong co-relation between membership service, development of workplace and workers performance, accountability and trade unionization. Finally, in order to realise the union activities and their roles in Tata Metaliks Limited and Tata Bearings, Kharagpore, West Bengal, specially in the context of Covid Era, descriptive analysis of the responses was carried out

Key Words: Trade unionism, Tata Metaliks, Tata Bearings, Workers performance, Covid Era

1. INTRODUCTION:

In manufacturing industry Trade Union always plays an important role concerning the employers and employees. Major disputes and downfalls in industrial organizations occur due to union activities. From the past history it reveals that trade unions always helped the worker and/or employees to improve their working conditions and financial benefits in lobbying governments and their agencies for legislations that favour workers and their families (Salamon 2002). On the other hand, since before independence it reveals that unions have great contribution in improving the social and economic condition and healthy ambience in the work field. In other words, leaders of Trade Union bargain with the Employer through collective bargaining which includes negotiation of wages and betterment of working conditions and other benefits.

It is also observed that since independence International Labour Organisation (ILO) has great impact on different unions of India. Unions and employees' association are the key platform to ventilate their grievances for achieving the different benefit, both socially and economically. The unions serve as protector against all the disadvantages, discriminations and untoward events faced by the workers and employees (Chhabra&Suri 2005).

1.1 Background of the Study:

In fact Trade unions have an important role on labour markets and societies of India. This thesis aims to examine how trade unionism affects workers. Trade unionism is the activities of association of workers in a workplace and it is simply defined as 'an alliance of workers to strengthen their efforts in bargaining with their correspondents.

The research topic in the area of trade unions seems to be very interesting and it also provides with some insights on how trade union works and its effects on workers which may be positive or negative. The issues to be discussed in this thesis are the effect of trade unions on wages, effects on fringe benefits, collective bargaining which directly or indirectly affects the performance of workers.

1.2 Purpose of the Study:

The main purpose of the study aims at finding out the effect of trade unionism on workers of industrial belt., specially in the context of Covid Era. Moreover, it will also specify other functions of trade unions towards benefitting both organization and employees. It also tries to determine the relation between trade unionism and the actions of management pointing out the process in settling industrial conflict in an organization, specially in the context of Covid Era.

1.3 Significance of the study:

This research work is expected to broaden the understanding of trade unionism. It will help the workers to make their demands by avoiding industrial conflicts. This research work will facilitate further studies by other researchers who have an interest in understanding the link between unions and workers. Moreover, it will help students to gain wider knowledge on the effects of trade unionism on workers at their workplace.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study:

This study is limited to two organisations named as Tata Metaliks Limited and Tata Bearings, Kharagpore in West Bengal having two trade unions viz. CITU & INTUC. The study, therefore, constructs a case on industrial relations. The entire study is based on the effects of trade union on workers and it could have been more interesting if it could be covered in more sectors and trade union. Due to time and accessibility constraints and also for maintaining the Corona restrictions the study was limited to two manufacturing industries only. In order to get comprehensive overview of the research problem, the Higher Executives of respective organisations could have been explored.

1.5 Research Questions:

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to put some questions keeping in view the environment of pandemic crisis.:

- Whether trade unionism in any way can influence workers?
- Whether membership of union brings security to workers' life ?
- How conflict can be resolved in organizations?
- Whether existence of trade union is only to fight for the interest of the workers?
- What effort unions have made to improve the performance of the workers in an organization?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Here in the review section it has been tried to highlight the main spectrum of scholarly work as available in the concerned literature. The research analysis minutely done for longer duration highlight the balanced picture of our study area – Consequence of unionization on Workers' performance in industrial organisations of Kharagpore. In fact, it has been tried to present the review in two dimensional way i.e. both internationally and nationally for better realising the progress of our research work

For the industrial unit of India, the Government of India has enumerated some Laws and Regulations which play an important role in case of unionization "There are about 108 statutes relating to industrial relations and they seem to be escalating at an assured pace" (Chandrashekhar, 1969, p.370).

It is observed (Indranil Bose Baisakhi Mitra Mustaphi,2018) that different aspects of trade union influence in the workplace of workers. In spite of enactments of laws and policies for providing facilities to workers trade union roles played an important roles on workers life and activities which corroborates our study in the organisations of Kharagpore industrial sector of West Bengal.

On examination of the roles of trade unions in India in perspective of changing the business environment at a broad level, it is observed about changing paradigms concerning the roles of plant-level unions for maintaining good industrial relations. Moreover, it has been also observed that trade unions are not only playing an active role in maintaining good industrial relations, but also in improving the quality of work life of employees. It also tried to opine that functions of the unions are an important ingredient for welfare of the workers which increase satisfaction lever of the workers(Piyali Ghosh, Shefali Nandan and Ashish Gupta ,2009). It also corroborates our survey, specially, during covid pandemic.

Pro-worker Regulation Act, specially in West Bengal, generally deteriorates the performance of worker causing the decrease in output of the manufacturing goods together with investment and employment(Timothy Besley and Robin Burgess,2012).

Psychological capital and supportive organizational climate play an important role in the managing performance of the employee (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008).

Spirited employee performance leads to achievement of organisational goals (Rafikul Islam, 2006).

The study is done to the effect of international trade on unionization. In fact, it is observed a rapid increase in union wages in India with a relatively faster rate of growth in net import industries. The study also points out that the impact of trade liberalization on union wages is not uniform across all unionized workers. Though trade liberization increased union wagers, it does not increase total wage of main unionized workers. This study will help for future research in greater industrial sector of India.(Reshad, Arghya and Devashis ,2014)

The selected questionnaire and its answer pointed out that trade unions play an important role in the working place of workers. It also pointed out there is need of comparative study of unionized and nonunionized workers. It also reveals that unionization did not have a significant differential impact on the wages in the petroleum hub of West Bengal (Bett Mary Jepkorir 2014). It shows that Trade unions also organize demonstrations, strikes, etc, in order to press demands of workers on being negotiations failed. Here activities of trade union were discussed showing their effectiveness in the organizations. The study also points out that every company should encourage for have trade unions as trade unions are successful in increasing production and improving workers'. It also corroborates our survey at organisations of Kharagpore during Covid period.

It is seen from the study that trade unions make the workplace safety and helps the workers to take help of the law of land for solving problem and trade unions creates negotiation bridge in between the workers and the management to improve the good environment in the working place and also in social life. The study also gives an idea about structure of union and its purpose. It also shows that widespread unionization plays an important role in the field of workplace, production and business., specially during covid period. It can only help in raising wages in competitive arena (R.Balaji ,2014). This review also justifies our study in the industrial hub of Kharagpore.

This study tried to find out the relationship in between workers and the trade union. (Manoranjan Dhal,2014) . It is found that trade unions are losing their influence over workers; on the other hand management is becoming more powerful.. It is of opinion that role of trade union is more adversarial in public sector than that of private sector. Moreover, he found significant difference of union role in some matters in case of public and private sector viz. in case of policy making, public sector is better than that of private sector. He also pointed out difference in the perception of workers in different fields, viz. wages, living condition, training, award etc. The study also indicates towards trade union performance to workers for having greater perception to be more vigilant in case of private sector,

3. CONCEPT OF TRADE UNION

According to Webbs, it can be said ‘as we understand the term, is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives. It has been defined in many ways by different authors. (Jackson 1983, 69)

As per concept of Dale Yoder trade union means as “a continuing long term association of employees, formed and maintained for the specific purpose of advancing and protecting the interests of the members in their working relationship”.

4. FUNCTIONS AND ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS :

The primary functions of trade unions are to promote and protect the interest of its members (Perlman, 1928; Hoxie, 1921) and to secure better working conditions of their employment, specially in the context of Covid crisis. The main functions of a trade union can be highlighted as follows:

- Bargaining for higher wages and for better working conditions for its members
- Providing management suggestions on personnel policies and practices.
- Helping workers in keeping their job intact and avoiding retrenchment in the workplace.
- Protecting members against discrimination and unfair justice of employers.
- Helping workers in all matters which results in workers interests. (Rao 2010, 294-295)

5.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Research refers to collecting and analyzing existing data to draw conclusions, make suggestions and suggest further research areas. This chapter deals with the precise description of the research methodology adopted by the researcher. The research problem of this research is the effects, rather consequence of trade unionism on workers. To end, reliability and validity of this research process are discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Research process:

Research is a systematic way of asking questions. But to call it research, the process must have certain features: it must, as far as possible, be controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical and critical. It is very important to understand the basics of designing a research. A research study should be clearly planned in all its stages and the research problem should be well defined. The information needed has to be identified properly and determine the data collecting method. The collected data needs to be analyzed in an appropriate way in order to reach a conclusion after which a reporting and dissemination of the results can be done.

The data used for analyzing the results in this study consists of two kinds of data – primary and secondary data. Primary data are the first hand data. Data collected are referred here as primary as they had been collected by the researcher himself for a specific research purpose. These are for example survey responses, questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, observation records and so on. Data collection can be a time consuming and an expensive process and it is not always possible to get the information needed but once it is received, primary data can be quite multilateral.

The data is referred to as secondary if the researcher uses the existing data rather than collecting the raw information. Examples of secondary data include information from the office of population census, survey data, social trend figures and so on. Secondary data can be very useful if researchers cannot get to the necessary sources to collect their own data. Secondary data have been widely used for this study purpose mainly in the theoretical part of the study. (Churton& Brown 2010, 218-220)

5.2 Research Design and Data Collection:

This research is conducted by gathering primary data by sending out the questionnaires and conducting interview at Tata Metalliks Limited and Tata Bearings at Kharagpore Industrial Hub. The study applies both the qualitative as well as the quantitative research method. During this research, qualitative research method has been used. According to D.T. Campbell “all research ultimately has a qualitative grounding”. The qualitative method was used because it possibly answers the questions of why, how and in what way. It is also because it is possible to collect data from the interviews, structured and non- structured interviews, and participant observation.(Hancock, 2002). On the other hand, quantitative approach is equally accompanied as it provides absolute values during the research. The values can also be examined in an unbiased manner. Tools such as questionnaires, surveys and other equipment have been used to collect the numerical or measurable data. Here, it has been also observed a broader picture of what to expect from the research in the quantitative research.

Personal interviews and questionnaires are used in building up this research work. In this study the primary data is collected from the questionnaires. There are in total 200 respondents out of 1000 sample population and the respond rate is 20%.

The main instrument used in the collection of data for this research work is a questionnaire survey. Closed ended questions are used because they provide a greater uniformity of responses and are more easily processed.

The questionnaire was sent by email to some extent and the rest by personal appearance before the workers and managing members of Tata Metalliks Limited and Tata Bearings of Kharagpore. The questionnaire is generally of qualitative nature. In order to acquire more qualitative data, it was necessary to go to the people personally who had firsthand knowledge. Moreover, interview was conducted among the two targeted groups of union officials including some Executives and workers.

6. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS:

In order to get the information which is needed for the research the questionnaires are distributed in the concerned companies of Kharagpore to be filled by union officials including staff, workers and some Executives as respondents in order to examine the perceptions of unionism in the workplace, specially, in the context of Covid Era. The questionnaire is split into two sections demographic and subjective. Gender, Age, Marital Status and Job tenure are included in demographic section and perception of workers about unionism encompassed in subjective section. 1000 Questionnaires are distributed in the concerned companies in which 200 complete questionnaires were received at the response rate of 20%. Non probability random sampling technique is used in gathering the data . A survey instrument in the form of close ended questionnaire was developed for the purpose of data.

Now it deals with the analysis of responses. The qualitative data has been examined in words and in fine , a conclusion has been drawn from the survey analysis.

6.1 Analysis of survey questionnaires:

In this section we have analysed the results of the questionnaire survey. All the questions have been analysed in the sequence order they were forwarded to the members.

Table-1

Demographic profile of respondents			
Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage%
Age	16-25 years	20	10
	26-35 years	75	37.5
	36-45 years	50	25
	46-60 years	40	20
	Above60 years	15	7.5
Gender	Male	170	85
	Female	30	15
Marital Status	Single	40	20
	Married	160	80
Company	Tata Metaliks Limited	125	62.5
	Tata Bearings	75	37.5
Position	Union Officials including Executives	25	12.5
	Workers	175	87.5

From the demographic profile of the respondents (Table -1) it is observed that out of 200 respondents 20 members i.e. 10% are in the age group of 16-25 years, 75 members i.e. 37.5% are in the age group of 26 to 35 years, 50 respondents i.e. 25% are in the age group of 36 to 45 years, while 40 members i.e. 20% are in the age group of 46 to 60 years and 15 members i.e. 7.5% are above 60 years. It is also observed that 170 respondents i.e. 85% indicates that majority belongs to male members while 30 members i.e. 15% belongs to female members. On the other hand it is observed from the table-1 that most of the respondents are married while 125 members i.e. 62.5 % are from Tata Metaliks Limited being quite bigger concern and 75 members i.e. 37.5% belongs to quite small concern of Tata Bearings. Finally the table shows that most of the respondents i.e. 87.5% belongs to members and non-member workers while only 12.5% respondents are from union officials.

Analysis of the survey (Subjective Section) according to the each question.

6.2 Whether trade unionism in any way can influence workers?

There were three possible answers to the question

Table – 2

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage
Very much	50	25%
Moderately	140	70%
Not at all	10	5%
Total	200	100%

Table-2 shows that out of total 200 respondents, there are 50 respondents i.e. 25% whose opinion is that the membership of Union has affected the work performance very much. 140 members i.e. 70% are of the opinion that union membership has affected moderately on the work performance. On the other hand, only 5% are of opinion that union membership has not affected them at all. So, it can be concluded that accepting membership of Union has influenced majority of the total workers.

6.3 Whether membership of union brings security to workers' life ?

There were four possible answers to the question

Table - 3

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage
Strongly agree	50	25%
Agree	130	65%
Slightly disagree	15	7.5%
Extremely disagree	5	2.5%
Total	200	100%

Table – 3 shows that most of the members believe and agree that it will bring security to their lives. We can see 130 members i.e.65% agree and it is also seen that 25% strongly agree that the membership will bring security to life. It can be concluded that unionism has created a good image in the minds of its workers in bringing security to their lives .

6.4 How familiar are you with the work and organization of trade union?

There are four possible answers provided to answer this question

Table - 4

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage.
Very good	60	30%
Good	120	60%
Poor	15	7.5%
Very poor	5	2.5%
Total	200	100%

From table - 4, it can be concluded that members are very much updated about the work and organization of the unions. 120 members i.e.60% are familiar while 30% are very much familiar with the work and organization of union and there are some members who are unaware of the work and organization. 10% respondents replied to that effect but comparatively the figure of good has surpassed the poorly answers.

6.5 Whether the Unions exert any influence on improving the working conditions and performance of its members?

There are five possible answers provided to answer the question.

Table - 5

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage.
Extremely influencing	50	25%
Very influencing	120	60%
Moderately influencing	20	10%
Slightly influencing	10	5%
Not at all influencing	0	0%
Total	200	100%

The results as shown in Table -5 indicate that most of the members believe that the Union has made effort on improving the working conditions of its members.120 members i.e. 60% state that the unions have greater role in improving the working conditions and performance of workers and it is very influencing. It can be concluded by saying that most of the workers feel that the unions have great influence on improving the working conditions and performance of workers and there are no members who state that union has no influence on working conditions at all. In addition it is also observed that one fourth of the total workers have given opinion about extreme power of the union in improving the performance and working condition of the workers.

6.6 What is your expectation about solving of various conflicts on being a member of Union?

There are five possible answers to answer the question.

Table - 6

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage
Better wages	80	40%
Legal protection	80	40%
Caring facilities throughout employment period	10	5%
Better working conditions	25	12.5%
Other opportunities	5	2.5%
Total	200	100%

From Table – 6 it is seen that 40% of the respondents were of the view that they expect legal protection from the Unions. There are mainly three things which members expect from the Unions to solve conflicts by providing legal protection, better wages and better working conditions. 80 members i.e. 40%also expect the help of unions to increase the wages. 25 members or 12.5% argue for better working conditions while they are at work. In a nutshell, it can be opined most of the members expect in solving conflicts on general basic things with the help of unions, both in their working and social life.

6.7 How high is the level of confidence you have in trade union representative in order to fight for workers' interest?

Table - 7

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage
I have full confidence on unions	150	75%
I rely on unions but to some extent	48	24%
I do not rely on unions	2	1%
Total	200	100%

From the interview it is seen that members have confidence on the union representatives. 75%, that is 150 members have full faith on union representatives while 24% believe so but to limit of certain extent. Surprisingly, we find that two members who do not rely on the unions at all. There can be various reasons why those few distrust the unions. Whatever may be, the major portion of members has good faith and confidence on the unions and their activities in respect of workers' interest. Table – 7 shows the Respondents' level of confidence on the union representatives.

6.8 Duration of the period as to how long have you been a member of Unions?

Table - 8

Subjective Profile		
Answers	Numbers	Percentage
1 year or less	5	2.5%
2 years	10	5%
3 years	35	17.5%
More than 3 years	150	75%
Total	200	100%

Table – 8 shows 150 respondents have been union members for more than three years. There are 5 respondents who have been members for less than one year and 10 respondents who have been members for two years. There are 35 respondents who have been members of union for three years now. There are members who express willingness to become union membership for having their security to life and leading a prosperous life. Moreover, most of the members also express willingness for becoming union member in order to get proper help from unions in workplace, specially during Covid situation.

7. SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

This section provides a summary of the study and Conclusions together with recommendations according to the research findings.

7.1 Summary of the findings

From the above study the following findings were made:

- The relationship between the trade union members and their performance at work is very meagre.
- The impact of trade unionism on the job security of the workers is very significant.
- The union members are well conversant with the current work and the organization.
- There is much influence of the unions on improving the performance and working conditions of its members.
- For uplifting the status, both socially and economically, of employees being members of unions, they have faith on their representatives, specially during the pandemic crisis.
- The members have acquired good perception of unionization understanding that by joining unions the interests of wage and salary earners are promoted effectively. In addition they expect more help being union member during crisis period.
- Most respondents expect legal protection from Unions, specially during Covid Era. They expect that unions will protect them from unnecessary dismissal from company without any cause during covid crisis. The next thing the respondents expect from unions to bargain for better wages and further consider unions to be the most important factors in improving their status, both socially and economically and well-being. In fine, some workers expect better working conditions from the unions. Therefore, workers want help of union for bargaining with employers for good working environment in order to prevent accidents and ill health and to improve their performance at work place. They also opine that union be the only saviour, specially during pandemic crisis.

8. CONCLUSION:

On the basis of the Findings, it can be opined that trade union is playing an active role in maintaining the quality life of the workers. In fact, for the security in life of the workers, the activities of unions is indispensable part as also in maintaining good harmonious industrial relations. It is also opined that Union be the only way to maintain the rules in order to escape from the difficulties during pandemic period.

Besides bringing security to life and improving working conditions the union should try to put more emphasis into bringing new values to its members. The union should concentrate on membership education and training to its

members. Union density is a major strength and power of any union. Unions with higher density can put pressure on management level and can have a positive influence on workers lives. The data analyzed shows that a union which has strong relationship with the workers is more powerful in influencing the management and which will ultimately results in benefits for the workers as well in the face of all types of adversity including covid period. In a nutshell, trade union should focus much more on the needs and desire of the members. The union should be much more member oriented. The members are paying the membership fees, so in return the representatives of the union should consider and provide good quality service. Participative decision making within the trade unions and management will lead to a stable atmosphere for improving performance and for which good workers performance can be achieved also in the face of all types of adversity including covid period.

8.1 Recommendations

The concept of trade unionism is born out of the need to ensure good working conditions and protection of the overall interest of employees. It is also a fact that without a responsible and result oriented workforce, work efficiency will decline causing loss to the industry.

So, in order to improve the effect of trade unionism on workers, the following suggestions are made.

- In order to avoid confrontation Unions should continue dialogue through the collective bargaining process and also demands should be realistic in nature.
- There should be existence of a formal both way communication between parties enabling right message being properly understood. This will help in maintaining a long term cordial and peaceful relationship between the parties in the face of all adversities.
- There should be membership services contributing most to satisfaction of workers. Moreover, transparency should be maintained between the members and the union.
- Finally, work efficiency can only be achieved through peaceful negotiation as also during the period of crisis. The union should ensure that their goals are suitable and appropriate. On the other hand, management should always provide path for dialogue as both parties are needed for better worker efficiency in the context of all adversities.

8.2 Suggestions for Further Research

It is observed that this case study will be helpful for further research work as it is found no research work of this nature has been done vividly, specially in the context of Covid period. though there are lot of research work on trade unions. In my study effect of the union has been clearly observed, specially in the context of Covid period. So, there will be scope for greater research work in determining the relationship between unions and management including workers which will be helpful by this study in near future, specially in the face of all adversities.

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