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PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES ON TRADE UNIONS IN PROMOTING INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

A trade union is an organization consisting of employees, employers, or independent workers acting together to safeguard and advance their shared interests via collective bargaining. It is an organization dedicated to securing economic advantages for its members. It was created for several purposes. Individual workers deemed it more beneficial to unite and endeavour to set their working terms and conditions. They recognized that negotiating as individuals would provide the employer greater influence, as each individual has less significance than a collective in the operation of the enterprise.¹ Trade unions are regarded as fundamentally reforming organizations and economic institutions that were grounded on the Sarvodaya ideals of Truth, nonviolence, and Trusteeship. Trade unions are significant entities in the contemporary industrialized landscape. Trade unions adhere to three fundamental principles: Unity is strength, Equal remuneration for equivalent effort, and Employment security. In India, trade unions are intricately connected to industrial relations.² This paper is an attempt to analyze the perception of employees towards trade unions in promoting industrial relations in Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC), Tirunelveli Division.

KEYWORDS: Trade Union, Collective bargaining, Security, Industrial relations

1. INTRODUCTION

Industrial relations are closely associated with Trade Unions in our country. Trade Unions work like a stepladder, which endorses an efficient feed of contact between the employees and management. Trade unions date back to the 18th century when the rapid development of industrial civilization drew

¹ https://backup.pondiuni.edu.in/storage/dde/downloads/hrmiii_irm.pdf

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348370744_EMPLOYEES_ATTITUDE_TOWARDS_TRADE_UNIONS_A_T_VOCHIDAMBARANAR_PORT_TRUST_THOOTHUKUDI

a considerable number of women, children, and foreigners into the labour force. Today's world places a high value on labour. Employers have begun to recognize the value of employees. Employees have begun to organize trade unions to safeguard their interests. Bosses all around the world have understood that discussion is the most effective approach to settling conflicts. Employees have understood that solidarity is essential for protecting themselves against exploitation. This is one of the reasons that trade unions are so vital today.

1.1 Trade Union and Collective Bargaining

Trade unions are formed to provide employees with equivalent negotiating power against their employers, who historically have the exclusive authority to determine the terms and conditions of employment and remuneration. Unions advocate for workers in a certain industry during talks with their employers. The union consists of a collective of workers, hence possessing a more substantial influence than if employees were negotiating with employers alone. In light of the altered social, political, and educational landscape regarding rights awareness, trade unions are seen as a fundamental element of the industrial relations system. The workers' union is essential for safeguarding the interests of its members.

Collective bargaining is a process of dialogue and negotiation between employers and employees over employment terms and working conditions. Employees are often represented by trade unions in articulating their grievances over working conditions and remuneration to the employer and management. Refusal to engage in good faith collective bargaining with the employer is an unfair labour practice under the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947. This technique is often effective, as it often prompts businesses to address workers' complaints. The legal process for engaging in collective bargaining in India is intricate.

1.2 Industrial Relation

The term 'industrial relation' comprises two words: 'industry and 'relation.' It means the relationship that emerges out of day-to-day working and association of labour and working and association of labour and management in the course of running an industry. The term 'relation' indicates 'the relations that exist in the industry between the employer and his workmen.' The concept of industrial relation also denotes the relations of the State with employer, workers, and their organizations³.

Industrial relations play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining industrial democracy. The establishment of good industrial relations depends on the constructive attitude on the part of both the

³C.B.Memoria and Satish Memoria, Dynamics of Industrial Relations, Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai, 1983, p.200.

management and the unions.⁴

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Any weakness in the labour relations system jeopardizes the social and economic development programme of a nation.⁵ A trade union is an association, either of employees or employers or of independent workers acting collectively, who seek to protect and promote mutual interests via collective bargaining. It is an association engaged in securing the economic benefits for its members. It came into being for a range of intentions. Individual workers found it more advantageous to band together and seek to establish their terms and conditions of employment.⁶ This paper is an attempt to analyze the perception of employees towards trade unions in promoting industrial relations in Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC), Tirunelveli Division. The functioning of trade unions in the Undertakings has been analyzed from the point of view of the workers and trade union members. The attitudes of workers and trade union leaders are analyzed from the proffer perspective.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is a descriptive study based on an empirical survey. To study the employees' perception towards trade unions at Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division, the researcher has used both primary and secondary data. A sample of 372 employees was selected based on the Proportionate Random Sampling technique. The secondary data were gathered from a range of sources, including both published and unpublished materials. These sources included records from the offices of the study unit as well as journals, newspapers, reports, and unpublished Ph.D. theses on the topic.

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study covers only the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division. It includes the eight divisions of Public Passenger Road Transport Corporations in Tamil Nadu. The study does not contain the Private Transport Undertakings.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parimalendu Bandyopadhyay (2021), in his paper titled "A Study on the Industrial Relations in the Select Collieries of Eastern Coalfields Limited," Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) has acquired a prominent position as an indicator of the growth of the economy and industrial progress of the country. To assess whether the prevailing state of Industrial Relations (IRs) practiced in select collieries of

⁴ S.K. Bhatia, International Practices in Industrial Relations, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2002, pp.7-8.

⁵ T.N.Mathur, Industrial Relations in the Public Sector, Arihant Publishers, 1990, p.20.

⁶ https://backup.pondiuni.edu.in/storage/dde/downloads/hrmiii_irm.pdf

ECL are harmonious or not. It indicates that a congenial atmosphere prevails in the select collieries of ECL that facilitates promoting sound industrial relations in the coal belt. It can be said that the industrial relations situation has not been very alarming, and it is under control. This research work is very valuable in understanding the climate of healthy industrial relations that existed in the select collieries of ECL under the study period. Maintenance of harmonious IRs between management and employees in industrial undertaking in the select collieries of ECL is of great significance to boost the economy of the country.

Samundeswari R (2020), in her journal titled “Employees Attitude towards Trade Unions at V.O.Chidambaranar Port Trust, Thoothukudi,” A trade union is an organization of workers acting collectively that seeks to protect and promote mutual interests through collective bargaining. The Industrial Revolution destroyed the older way of life and left the individual worker at the mercy of the employer, "who became the catalytic agent that crystallized them into a self-conscious group." The worker became completely dependent on others for his living, and "equality" began to signify equality in competitive conflict. Trade unions are regarded as fundamentally reforming organizations and economic entities grounded on the Sarvodaya ideals of Truth, nonviolence, and Trusteeship. Trade unions are significant entities in the contemporary industrialized landscape. Trade unions adhere to three fundamental principles: Unity is strength, Equal remuneration for equivalent effort, and Job security. In India, trade unions are intricately connected to industrial relations. Currently, the trade union movement has evolved beyond merely advocating for the material welfare of its members; it now serves as a robust entity that defends the political, social, and cultural interests of its constituents while also addressing the specific needs of entrepreneurial and intellectual workers, particularly concerning their careers, employment, remuneration, paid leave, vocational training, and health and recreational enhancement initiatives. A trade union functions as a conduit for both sides, facilitating an effective communication route.

Misti Das (2016), in her paper titled “Changing Perception of Employees Towards Trade Unionism: A Study in Odisha,” The paper examines the multiple facets of trade unionism in the state of Odisha, India. This paper presents the findings of a survey carried out among trade union activists located in the eastern region of India, specifically in the state of Odisha. The survey aims to understand how unionized employees perceive the role of trade unions and their prospects moving forward. The study examines three significant aspects of trade unionism: the characteristics of trade unions, leadership, and membership within trade unions. Effective leadership was found to be the most important characteristic of the present union. It was found that respondents rated aggressiveness as the most essential quality of a trade union leader. The most important factor that inspires members to join a specific union is its linkage to a particular party, and the most important factor that counts for higher membership of a union is the political belief with which it is associated.

Minati Das and Madhuchhanda Mohanty (2016), in their journal, titled “Changing Perception of Employees Towards Trade Unionism: A Study in Odisha,” This paper focuses on various aspects of trade unionism in Odisha, India. The objectives of the paper stem from the information procured from a trade unionist survey in the eastern region of India within the state of Odisha. The survey seeks to understand how employees in the trade union perceive the existing position of trade unions and its future. The study aims to analyze three significant features of trade unionism, i.e., structures of trade union, trade union leadership, and trade union membership. Most of the respondents assessed the current union as having its most important characteristic ineffective leadership. Respondents reported that aggressiveness is the most important trade union leader quality. Party linkage is what primarily motivates members to a specific union and it is the political affiliation of the union that mainly explains its increased membership.

Piyali Ghosh (2009), in his journal titled “The Changing Roles of Trade Unions in India: A Case Study of National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), Unchahar,” Trade unions are an essential part of the modern structure of industrial relations in any country because every nation comes with its own set of goals. Due to shifts in the political, social, and educational spheres, these unions have been known to also serve the new purpose of improving the overall life of workers, moving beyond simply providing employment. This paper addresses plant-level trade unions with particular reference to the NTPC Unchahar plant, which is one of the largest and most successful Public Sector Undertakings in India. This is a descriptive study of various trade unions at the Unchahar plant, which seeks to cover their salient features, ideologies, objectives, and union structures. The aim is to query the new paradigms of plant-level unions: Rather than focusing on maintaining favourable industrial relations as their primary goal, they are now actively working to serve the industrial welfare which used to be viewed as a tertiary purpose.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

6.1 Mode of Join in Trade Union

Human beings are rational creatures. They usually act rationally in different spheres of their lives. Similarly, workers join a union with a rational approach to whether joining a union will be beneficial or not. This can simply be decided by making a cost-benefit analysis in this regard. The excess of benefits over costs, i.e., profit or reward, justifies workers’ joining a trade union. A worker becomes a member of a trade union after being satisfied with the performance of that union. The union leaders do influence the workers to become members of their unions. Researchers have devoted a great deal of time and effort to studying “why employees choose to join a union. The details are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Mode of Joining in Trade Union by the Employees

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Mode of Joining</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage to Total</i>
1.	On my own	181	48.66
2.	Persuasion by union leaders	117	31.45
3.	Persuasion by co-workers	74	19.89
Total		372	100.00

Source: Primary Data

It is examined from Table 1 that 181 (48.66%) respondents joined the trade union by their own decision, 117 (31.45%) respondents were persuaded by union leaders, and the residual of 74 (19.89%) respondents were influenced by co-workers in the corporation.

Most of the respondents (48.66%) joined the trade union voluntarily on their own.

6.2 Reasons for Joining Trade Union in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division

Human beings are rational creatures. They usually act rationally in different spheres of their lives. Likewise, employees join a trade union based on the reason of whether joining will be beneficial or not. Researchers concentrate more on studying “Why do employees choose to join a union?” Employees need to have a sense of job security and want to be sure that management will not make unfair and arbitrary decisions about their employment. They look to unions to ensure that their jobs are duly protected against layoff, recall, promotion, etc. An attempt has been made to analyze the various reasons for joining the Trade Union in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division. The respondents are asked to rank their responses in the questionnaire, which has been analyzed using the Garrett Ranking method.

Garret ranks are calculated by using the appropriate Garret ranking formula. Based on it, Garret's table value is ascertained. Finally, by adding each row, the total Garret score is obtained and tabulated in Table 2.

$$\text{Percent Position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_j}$$

Where,

R_{ij} = Rank given for the i^{th} variable by the j^{th} respondent

N_j = Number of variables ranked by the first respondent.

TABLE 2
Reasons for Joining Trade Union in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division - Garret Ranking

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Reasons for Joining Trade Union</i>	<i>Total Score</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Rank</i>
1.	To develop leadership quality	20841	56.02	II
2.	To obtain better working conditions and welfare facilities	22590	60.73	I
3	To get job benefits	20391	54.81	III
4.	Political affinity	19818	53.27	IV
5.	To get job security	18071	48.58	VIII
6.	Union gives strength and status	19289	51.85	V
7.	Influence by friends and colleagues	17778	47.79	IX
8.	Easy to get promotions and advancement	19063	51.24	VI
9.	To safeguard against victimization	17576	47.25	X
10	To solve individual grievances	16345	43.94	XII
11.	The majority of workers are members	16709	44.92	XI
12.	Cannot afford to remain as a non-member	18449	49.59	VII

Source: Computed Primary Data

It is observed from Table 2 that ‘To obtain better working conditions and welfare facilities ’ has been ranked as the first factor for the reasons to influence the employees to join trade union in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division, ‘To development leadership quality’ has been ranked second, ‘To get job benefits ’ third position, followed by ‘Political affinity’ in the fourth rank, ‘Union gives strength and status’ ranked as the fifth rank, ‘Easy to get promotion and advancement’ has been given sixth rank, ‘Cannot afford to remain as a non-member’ ranked as seven, ‘To get job security’ has been ranked eight, ‘Influence by friends and colleagues’ ranked as the ninth position, ‘To safeguard against victimisation’ has been ranked the tenth rank, ‘Majority of workers are members’ has been ranked as eleventh position and ‘To solve individual grievances’ has been ranked as twelfth rank factor for the reasons to join in Trade Union in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division.

6.3 PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES ABOUT TRADE UNIONISM

The economic growth and advancement of certain regions have led to the increase of trade unions.

The role of trade unions within organizations and the employees has numerous interpretations. Various approaches have been taken in studying these impacts, benefits, and drawbacks. In this paper, the relationships between trade unions and the performance of specific activities in an organization, including employment security, training and development, discrimination, and the organizational long-term performance are analyzed. Unions can substantially enhance corporate governance and service conditions which optimizes the working environment, thus facilitating service delivery. Built on well-established tenets of socialism, Trade Unions are major institutional representatives of the working class in modern states, and through the unions, the workers get economic benefits.

TABLE 3
Opinion of the Employees about Trade Unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>A.</i>	<i>N.O.</i>	<i>D.S.</i>	<i>S.D.A.</i>	<i>Total</i>
1.	All TNSTC employees like to join Trade Unions	135 (36.29)	159 (42.74)	60 (16.13)	10 (2.69)	8 (2.15)	372 (100.00)
2.	Trade Unions in the corporation are effective and work properly	152 (40.86)	134 (36.02)	69 (18.55)	14 (3.76)	3 (0.81)	372 (100.00)
3.	Management has attended to the various problems represented by the Union	126 (33.87)	143 (38.44)	80 (21.51)	17 (4.57)	6 (1.61)	372 (100.00)
4.	Unions ensure job security for all employees	134 (36.02)	131 (35.22)	72 (19.35)	26 (6.99)	9 (2.42)	372 (100.00)
5.	Union leaders usually have good relationships with employees	102 (27.42)	121 (32.53)	94 (25.27)	37 (9.95)	18 (4.84)	372 (100.00)
6.	Union is always successful in their career with the management of corporation	113 (30.38)	145 (38.98)	56 (15.05)	37 (9.95)	21 (5.65)	372 (100.00)
7.	Unions help in settling worker's disputes	102 (27.42)	153 (41.13)	75 (20.16)	28 (7.53)	14 (3.76)	372 (100.00)
8.	Interunion disputes did not affect the interest of the workers	108 (29.03)	120 (32.26)	92 (24.73)	35 (9.41)	17 (4.57)	372 (100.00)
9.	Trade unions believe strikes are a weapon to get employees	112 (30.11)	136 (36.56)	65 (17.47)	32 (8.60)	27 (7.26)	372 (100.00)

	benefits						
10.	Trade unions promote industrial relations in TNSCTC	115 (30.91)	128 (34.41)	80 (21.51)	28 (7.53)	21 (5.65)	372 (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in bracket indicate percentage to total

6.4 APPLICATION OF RELIABILITY TEST ON THE PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES ABOUT TRADE UNIONISM

To test the reliability of the opinion of the employees about the trade unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division, Cronbach's Alpha Test has been applied, and the result has been shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Reliability Statistics on the Opinion of Employees about Trade Unionism

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha Score</i>
Opinion of the Employees about Trade Unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division	0.823

Source: Primary Data.

Table 3 shows that the calculated value of Cronbach's Alpha score on the opinion of the employees about Trade Unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division is more than 0.07. Hence, it is concluded that the opinion of the employees about Trade Unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division, could be relied upon.

6.5 KENDALL'S COEFFICIENT OF CONCORDANCE TEST

Kendall's Co-efficient of Concordance test is a non-parametric test. This test can be used to measure the ranking which is in the top position. It can be applied when there are more than two rankings to be measured. The ranks are given to statements based on the total scores. Hence, the test has been applied to know the opinion of the employees about Trade Unionism. The level of opinion of the employees about Trade Unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division, can be measured by using SPSS packages.

Ho: There is no significant difference between the opinions of the employees about the Trade Unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division.

TABLE 5
Opinion of the Employees and the Level of Satisfaction about
Trade Unionism– Kendall's Co-efficient of Concordance

Sl. No.	Opinion of the Employees and the Level of Satisfaction about Trade Unionism	Mean Rank	Test of Statistics				
			No. of Respondents	Kendall	Ch-square Test	d.f.	Asym. Sig.
1.	All TNSSTC employees like to join Trade Unions	6.06	372	0.027	90.672	9	0.000
2.	Trade Unions in the corporation are effective and work properly	6.16	372				
3.	Management has attended to the various problems represented by the Union	5.84	372				
4.	Unions ensure job security for all employees	5.76	372				
5.	Union leaders usually have good relationships with employees	4.99	372				
6.	Union is always successful in their career with the management of corporation	5.32	372				
7.	Unions help in settling worker's disputes	5.35	372				
8.	Interunion disputes did not affect the interest of the workers	5.05	372				
9.	Trade unions believe strikes are a weapon to get employees benefits	5.23	372				
10.	Trade unions promote industrial relations in TNSSTC	5.26	372				

Source: Computed Primary Data.

Table 5 elucidates the level of satisfaction of employees about trade unionism in State Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli Division. Here, Kendall's 'W'-Test is used to measure the level of satisfaction with trade unionism. Since the 'p' value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected

at a one percent level of significance. It is concluded that there is a significant difference among the opinions of the employees about the trade unionism instate Transport Corporation, Tirunelveli division.

Based on the mean rank, the most preferred reasons for their opinion is “Trade Unions in the corporation are effective and working properly,” followed by the “All TNSTC employees like to join in Trade Unions” as second one among the various factors responsible for the level of satisfaction on trade unionism in transport corporation. The statement with the lowest score on trade unionism is “Union leaders usually have a good relationship with employees.”

7. CONCLUSION

The perception of employees toward trade unions in promoting plays a key role in shaping the dynamics of workplace harmony and productivity. The effectiveness of trade unions in promoting industrial relations depends on the level of transparency, leadership, and communication within the industry itself. Employees tend to appreciate unions that engage in constructive dialogue with management, contribute to conflict resolution, and support a fair distribution of benefits. Yet, challenges such as internal politics, lack of unity, and insufficient representation still exist, potentially hindering the full potential of trade unions in fostering positive industrial relations. To enhance the role of trade unions, unions need to evolve by addressing employees’ concerns more effectively, strengthening their organizational structures, and focusing on collaborative partnerships with management. By doing so, trade unions can contribute not only to improved industrial relations but also to the broader success and stability of the organization.

Finally, the perception of employees on trade unions underscores the importance of active and transparent participation in the industrial relations process. When trade unions align their goals with the interests of both employees and employers, they can become powerful instruments in promoting a positive and sustainable working environment.

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