ABSTRACT

It is noticeable that globalisation has influenced every aspect of human life. Industrial life revolves around industry, workers and trade unionism has undergone drastic changes after 1990, while India proceeded on path of globalisation through introducing New Economic Policy in 1991. This thesis incorporates all these developments from macro to micro, to study the trade unionism at firm level, Tata Steel Jamshedpur.

Globalisation rooted on neo-liberalism provided new development discourse to world economy which was trapped in crises in 1970s-80s. Based on openness and interconnectedness, it provided both opportunities and challenges either countries or industry to garner advantages though integration with world economy. It is reversal of development paradigm of 1950s which advocated reliance on public sectors, import substitution strategies. It emphasis on private sectors and export led development. The compulsion of integration and reap benefits, developing countries brought drastic changes in policies and practices for flourishing business.

In India, the changed policies and practices could be witnessed in new economic policy and industrial policy. The new economic policy lowered the tariff and encouraged foreign direct investment. New industrial policy encouraged private sectors through de-licensing; remove restrictions on expansions and price control. The government also created industries friendly environment through changed practices on labour and trade union issues. These changes influenced industries and they proceeded for massive restructuring in several dimensions as downsizing, capacity enhancement, technology up-gradation etc.

Along with massive reduction of regular workers, industries executed massive restructuring which led to several form of informality, as informalisation, casualisation and contractualisation. Peripheral or non-core part of production was outsourced to informal sectors; production process was casualised and contract workers were utilised for core part of production.

These developments reduced the bargaining power of industrial workers. Marketplace bargaining power looks declined by large presence of unemployed workers in labour market. Workplace bargaining power is in dwindled status because of deskilling work. Associational power seems to be eroded due to changed practices of government, which is concentrating on investments of private parties. The changed circumstances have created several hurdles for trade unionism.
Tata Steel, as renowned integrated steel enterprise, underwent these restructuring processes. It reduced its workforce from 80 thousand in 1990s to 35 thousand in 2013 and increased its production in Jamshedpur in five times from 2.4 million tons in 1992 to 10 million tons in 2013 without any disturbances as reported in media.

How could it be possible, this is the major part of the study? Apart from this, this study account the consequences on workers and the role and responses of recognised union Tata Workers’ Union on the major events linked with restructuring occurring after 1990.

The thesis concludes that there are several versions of trade unionism in India. Whereas, other unions active in public sectors and government departments are escaping narrow interests and incorporating general welfare of working class, Tata Workers’ Union still revolves around sectional interests. The responses of Tata Workers’ Union seem to be pragmatic and it has been succeeded to protect workers’ interests either in service or retrenched. But, in larger working class interests, it could not be said well. The survival of firm is important for trade unionism, but ignoring workers’ interests especially contract workers’ concerns would be harmful in long run. Unfortunately, Trade unionism in Tata Steel follows this trend.

This thesis also substantiates that Industrial Act, 1947 is not creating hurdle for massive downsizing as propagated by industrialists. In other hand it provides some bargaining power to workers for not separation with starvation from labour market. Trade Union Act, 1926 is not caused for proliferation of trade unionism in industry as stated.