CHAPTER 8

TRADE UNIONS, WOMEN'S LABOUR ORGANISATIONS & THE ROLE OF ELITE WOMEN

8.1 Introduction

Trade union is regarded as a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives. [Punekar S., Deodhar S. & Shankaran S., P.181]

The growth of trade union is a recent phenomenon which mainly emerged after industrialisation. That is why it is called as a child of industrialisation. The main aim of the trade union is to represent the class interest of all workers & should keep a steady economic pressure on employers for improved benefits & for the peaceful nationalisation of industry. Unionism is a useful device in the workers class war against the bourgeoisie according to the western historical tradition.

The growth of trade union followed widely different courses in different parts of the world. To meet the demand of the workers for political, social & cultural equality a wider labour movement was required of which trade unions formed a part. Unionism typically developed as a part of a wider labour movement, with a political party of the workers usually taking the lead. Frequently the party organised the unions & provided them with leadership.
Trade union movement grew in India as a part of wild industrialisation in pre-independence & post independence era. The men & women workers joined the movement and became the members of the trade unions. Major political parties, especially the communist parties led this movement in all sectors. Women joined this movement, became its members & began to march ahead for economic justice. The participation of women, in terms of the membership of trade unions, participating in the trade unions as office bearers, grew in course of time. Apart from the trade unions affiliated to the parties many women labour organisations were established aiming at solving working women's problems. Women labour movement specifically grew to solve the problems faced by women workers like equal pay to equal work, sick & maternity leave, job security, creches & child care centres etc. The women political elites who were active trade unionists became the pioneers & office bearers of this movement. The women from organised & unorganised sectors joined this movement.

This chapter deals with the participation of women in the trade unions, working of the trade unions & the role of elite women who mainly contributed for the economic uplift of women.

8.2 The Growth Of The Trade Unions In India:

The advent of the trade unionism in India could be traced to the early days of industrialisation beginning in 1850s with the
establishment of cotton & jute mills in Bombay & Calcutta. The economic & political events have moulded its growth pattern & contributed to its present strength & weaknesses. [Varma P., Mookherji S., P.11]

The emergence of the trade unions is thus a historical legacy. The trade union movement gained two important dimensions in the pre-independece era - (a) a fight against the capitalist bourgeoisie class (b) a fight against foreign political rule. Though efforts were made to solve worker's problems through Labour Commission, still the worker's various problems were not brought to the forefront. The first significant phase of development took place when All India Trade Union Congress [AITUC] was established on 31st October 1920 under Lala Latpatraj. The main objective of AITUC was to promote worker's economic, social & political interests. Soon the movement spread all over India. The World War II brought world wide great depression, consequently affecting industrial workers. Especially the workers from Bombay were the maximum sufferers. The then Government passed a number of Acts like Bombay Industrial Disputes Act of 1938, The Bombay Shop Assistance Act,1939, Bombay Maternity Act, 1939 & C.P. Maternity Act, 1939 etc.

By 1947, many leading trade unions were established. A number of trade unions like AITUC, INTUC, HMS, CITY, BMS etc. became major national trade unions & a process of consolidation of the trade union movement began in 1950. [Varma S. & Mookherji S., P.16 to 19]
The working of the trade unions, in the course of time, was basically dominated by a loose & complex structure & does not confirm to a single pattern. Industrywise & sectorwise variations are commonly evident. Not only that but increasing unionisation of white collar & professional employees has also become a predominant feature in India & elsewhere. These white collar & professional employees became increasingly eager to take radical action in the pursuit of their occupational objectives. They claimed higher prestige on social origin, manner of dress & speech, taste, education, working conditions & association with the managerial cadre. [Bain G., P.48]

Trade unions took a number of dimensions since independence in India, incorporating men & women from organised & unorganised workers, white collar professional workers & workers from industrial & agricultural sectors. Table 8.2(1) gives a detailed information relating to the number of registered trade unions, number of unions who submitted returns & the male & female membership in them from 1975 to 1984.
Table 8.2(1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.of Registered Trade Unions</th>
<th>No.of Unions Submitting Returns</th>
<th>Membership of Unions Submitting Returns (in thousands)</th>
<th>Average Membership per Union Submitting Returns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>29,438</td>
<td>10,324</td>
<td>6,063</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(35.1)</td>
<td>(92.6)</td>
<td>(7.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>29,350</td>
<td>9,777</td>
<td>6,121</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(33.3)</td>
<td>(93.6)</td>
<td>(6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977(P)</td>
<td>30,810 (E)</td>
<td>9,003</td>
<td>5,548</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(39.9)</td>
<td>(91.9)</td>
<td>(8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978(P)</td>
<td>32,361 (E)</td>
<td>8,727</td>
<td>5,771</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(38.5)</td>
<td>(93.0)</td>
<td>(7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979(P)</td>
<td>34,430 (E)</td>
<td>10,021</td>
<td>6,915</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(39.7)</td>
<td>(92.5)</td>
<td>(7.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980(P)</td>
<td>36,507 (E)</td>
<td>4,432</td>
<td>5,109</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(18.9)</td>
<td>(94.1)</td>
<td>(5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981(P)</td>
<td>37,539</td>
<td>6,682</td>
<td>5,012</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(45.6)</td>
<td>(92.9)</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982(P)</td>
<td>38,313 (E)</td>
<td>5,044</td>
<td>2,822</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(35.1)</td>
<td>(94.1)</td>
<td>(5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983(P)</td>
<td>38,935 (E)</td>
<td>6,844</td>
<td>5,011</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(44.0)</td>
<td>(92.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984(P)</td>
<td>42,609 (E)</td>
<td>6,431</td>
<td>4,707</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(28.8)</td>
<td>(91.4)</td>
<td>(8.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: Indian Labour Year Book, 1987, P.72]
Table 8.2(1) indicates the growth in the number of trade unions in India. In 1975 the number of registered trade unions was 29,438; whereas in 1984, it reached to 42,609. The percentage of male members to the unions was 92.6% & the percentage of female members was 7.4% in 1975. In 1984 it reached to 91.4% of male members & 8.6% female members. This indicates that the percentage of male & female as members of the trade unions did not increase much in these ten years.

The trade union movement grew in Maharashtra because of many industrial & agricultural sectors getting developed. Maharashtra stands first among the states of India in the trade union movement. In 1976, for example, Maharashtra stood third as far as the number of unions was concerned, but as far as the number of organised workers were concerned Maharashtra was the first. A large number of registered unions do not send their annual returns to the Registrar of Trade unions. At the All India level the percentage of unions sending their returns is about 33%, while in Maharashtra, it is more than 50%. This indicates that the trade unionism in this state has reached a more mature level. A large number of trade unions are steady & are running smoothly.[Vaidya S., P.16]

Bombay is a town which is buzzing with industrial activity. It is a very busy part & a centre of international trade. It provides jobs for port workers. It also employs a large number of
people in Railways. Cotton industries, Textile industries, engineering & chemical factories are located in Bombay. Some unions are quite well off, with their own buildings offering a number of welfare facilities to their members. Table 8.2(2) indicates the male & female membership in the trade unions from Bombay during 1975 to 1985.

### Table 8.2(2)

**Male & Female Membership In The Trade Unions From Bombay During 1975 To 1985:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The years (31st Dec.)</th>
<th>Number of the Registered Trade Unions</th>
<th>Number of the trade unions included in Report</th>
<th>Male Members</th>
<th>Female Members</th>
<th>Percentage of female membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>3,657</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>15,11,991</td>
<td>94,866</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>3,697</td>
<td>1,626</td>
<td>16,83,412</td>
<td>1,10,225</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3,590</td>
<td>1,772</td>
<td>17,70,814</td>
<td>1,30,740</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>3,476</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>17,53,263</td>
<td>1,38,650</td>
<td>7.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>3,662</td>
<td>1,842</td>
<td>20,05,980</td>
<td>1,61,583</td>
<td>7.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3,461</td>
<td>1,822</td>
<td>20,15,303</td>
<td>1,64,580</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3,346</td>
<td>1,816</td>
<td>20,19,944</td>
<td>2,24,384</td>
<td>9.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>3,666</td>
<td>1,819</td>
<td>20,79,740</td>
<td>2,12,978</td>
<td>9.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>3,545</td>
<td>2,024</td>
<td>22,82,071</td>
<td>2,43,116</td>
<td>9.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>3,711</td>
<td>1,477</td>
<td>19,80,199</td>
<td>2,07,274</td>
<td>9.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>3,916</td>
<td>2,427</td>
<td>28,65,847</td>
<td>2,97,600</td>
<td>9.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Labour Commission Report, Bombay, P.7)
Table 8.2(2) has shown a steady growth in the percentage of women as the members of the trade unions. In 1975, the percentage of women members, in one thousand four hundred ninety registered trade unions was 5.9% and in 1985 the percentage of women members, in two thousand four hundred twenty seven registered trade unions was 9.41%. This indicates the growth in the registered trade unions as well as growth in the percentage of women membership.

The participation of women in the trade unions, thus, seems to be slowly increasing. 8.3 deals with the study of women in the trade unions.

8.3 Women In The Trade Unions:

At present women represent 30% of the labour force. However their active participation is necessary to strengthen the trade unions as a whole. The economic activity of women is essential for the economy, society at large, the family & women themselves. Women, like men, basically join trade unions not only to improve their working conditions, but also their living conditions, i.e. to protect & defend their interests as women workers in the widest sense. It is also necessary to promote the integration of women into trade union organisations & their participation in the trade union activities & in the decision making bodies at all levels. [Report, Equality for Women In Trade Unions, P.1]
The participation of women in the trade unions in India can be studied in the five different categories.

i) Participation of women by way of awareness & consciousness in them towards the trade unions.

ii) Participation of women in the trade unions in terms of membership.

iii) Participation of women in the trade union activities like morchhas, strikes, demonstrations, dharanas etc.

iv) Participation of women in the trade unions as organisers taking responsibility of some units.

v) Participation of women in the trade unions as office bearers, in the decision making process.

i) Participation Of Women By Way Of Awareness & Consciousness Among Them Towards The Trade Unions:

Since the growth of the trade unions, women workers had become aware of the utility of the trade unions. After the World War I, the women began to work to earn money & the idea of incorporating women in the trade unions slowly developed. In Maharashtra, the women like Smt. Shanta
Bhalerao, Smt. Godavari Parulekar, Smt. Usha Dange, Smt. Ambika Joglekar, Smt. Meenakhi Sane & Smt. Janki Apte became active trade unionists. The employment of the women was mainly in the textile & cotton mills of Bombay. As the number of women in the employment was less the women were not organised. The exploitation of women in the family & in the society was more. Hence it was necessary to organise these women & bring them out of this wretched condition.

Efforts to organise & unionise female workers were made quite early. Thus as early as 1922 the female workers of Bombay met with the object of organising clerical workers of the city. Attempts were also made to organise women in other trades also. Similarly in September 1933 a Bombay Presidency Women's Conference was held. [Mathur A. & Muthur J., P.71]

Especially the communist Party women elite became aware of this fact & devoted their lives to help these women through women labour organisations & trade unions.

The women became more conscious towards their problems as the employment of women increased. The trade unions of nurses, Air hostesses, bank employees, L.I.C. employees, teachers etc. became more active during the decade.

For the purpose of knowing the level of participation of women in the trade unions, a few elite women were interviewed. Smt. Ahilya Rangnekar has opined that now the women are becoming aware of their rights & hence are in favour of trade unions & women labour organisations. In fact if women determine, they prove to be as conscious as the men workers. Educated women, law graduates are now attracted to these activities. Smt. Rosa Deshpande also expressed her satisfaction, in her interview, towards the increasing awareness among the women workers. Dr.(SMT.) Shanta Vaidya has opined that now the women know the importance of the trade unions & are willing to support its activities. [Abstracts from the interviews]

The decade has definitely & positively influenced the women workers in favour of trade unions & women labour organisations. In 1976 Equal Wage to Equal Work Act was passed. Since 1978 the workers had resisted the injustice on them through their organisations. All these factors clearly
indicate that the women are becoming aware towards trade unions & women labour organisations.

ii) Participation Of Women In Terms Of Membership In The Trade Unions:

The employment of women in industry demands their participation in terms of membership of the unions. As the trade union activities grew in the course of time, the membership of women also should have been grown. However, in this regard the picture is not much satisfactory. Though women make good industrial workers, their performance in the union is woefully 'inadequate'. Their instrumental approach to the union in normal times link them not beyond payment of membership fees. They would go to the union only when their own interests are threatened. This instrumentalism itself of a limited kind. [Ramawsswamy U., P.8]

Within the organised sector, women's involvement & participation in trade unions is very limited. The existing social & cultural values continue to inhibit women; the 'double shift' that women work which leaves them little time to devote to voluntary concerns like union movement. [Sood K., Central Women Workers' Committee, Information Bulletin For Women Workers V, INTUC, 1990, P.21] Legal restrictions on night work & overtime circumscribe their activity to limited hours. Several of these factors make women half hands.
The women involved in manual works become the members of the trade unions. But the white collar professional workers do not easily become the members of the union. Though definite awareness is created during the decade, the voluntary membership has not increased. In these cases, the membership fee is deducted from their salary. This increases the membership of women but these women cannot be regarded as active workers. Women doctors, nurses, professors, air hostesses are the members of the union but do not actively participate. During the professor's strike, the women professors remained aloof from the movement. [Gawankar R., P.210-211].

Several studies have shown that the women employee, whatever be the job she holds, is equal in efficiency & performance as the male employee in identical employment situation. [Lalita Devi U., P.25]

All these factors together lead to conclude that the membership of women in the trade unions is not satisfactory. Tables 8.3(1) & 8.3(2) indicate the membership of men & women workers in the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh & Mill Mazdoor Sabha, Bombay as the sample illustrations.
Table 8.3(1)

Male & Female Membership In The Trade Union During The Decade: (1975 - 1985)

Name of the Trade Union: Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh, Bombay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Male Members</th>
<th>Female Members</th>
<th>Percentage of Female Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1,23,467</td>
<td>1,15,316</td>
<td>8,151</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1,25,826</td>
<td>1,17,411</td>
<td>8,415</td>
<td>6.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1,00,043</td>
<td>91,460</td>
<td>8,583</td>
<td>8.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1,08,449</td>
<td>99,270</td>
<td>9,179</td>
<td>8.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1,29,549</td>
<td>1,18,807</td>
<td>10,742</td>
<td>8.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,39,153</td>
<td>1,26,619</td>
<td>12,534</td>
<td>9.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1,07,492</td>
<td>97,691</td>
<td>9,801</td>
<td>9.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Textile Strike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Matter pending in the High Court.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,00,668</td>
<td>92,994</td>
<td>7,674</td>
<td>7.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1,12,109</td>
<td>1,03,202</td>
<td>8,907</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: From The Record Of RMMS.)
Table 8.3(2)

Name of the Trade Union: Mill Mazdoor Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Male Members</th>
<th>Female Members</th>
<th>Percentage of Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>15,853</td>
<td>14,991</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>16,250</td>
<td>15,490</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>15,735</td>
<td>14,999</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>17,045</td>
<td>16,182</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>18,571</td>
<td>17,715</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>17,991</td>
<td>17,195</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>16,377</td>
<td>15,859</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>12,246</td>
<td>11,882</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>14,078</td>
<td>13,687</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>12,435</td>
<td>12,115</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>11,298</td>
<td>11,026</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: From The Record Of M.M.S.]

Tables 8.3(1) and 8.3(2) have indicated that the membership of women workers in the trade union is only 2% to 8% & that it is extremely poor if compared to men workers which is 90% to 97%. Table 8.2(1) indicating the membership of women, also shows the percentage ranging between 7.4% to 8.6% during 1975-1984.

The awareness in favour of trade unions is not
explicitely seen in terms of membership in the trade unions. Women have yet to develop a positive approach in this regard.

iii) Participation Of Women In The Trade Union Activities Like Participating In The Morchas, Strikes, Dharanas, Demonstrations:

The membership of women in the trade unions may not be a sign of their active participation. The real participation of women can be understood when women largely participate in the activities of the trade unions.

The women participate in the trade union activities if it becomes a prime necessity for them or for their personal problems or at critical times like strikes. Otherwise the participation of women in the union activities is not very encouraging.

The women had participated in the union activities before independence also. In 1928-1929 strike of textile mills in Bombay the women had actively supported. The textile mill strike of 1934, the Bitiya Mill Satyagraha of 1939 are the two illustrations where women had actively participate in the mass agitation campaigns. The world Recession of mid nineteen thirties brought unemployment to women workers. After independence, whenever a major issue arose, women joined the
movement. In 1960 & in 1974, Smt. Rosa Deshpande had organised all the women workers working in Chemical industries to fight against the injustice on women.' [Deshpande R., Interview]

During the decade, much development had taken place. In 1983 All India Women's Labour Conference was held which brought an overall awakening towards the issues of women. The Central Government Employees Union had formed Women's Cooperative Committee & through it fought to get some essential provisions like maternity leave, creches etc. Accordingly in April 1986, the Maharashtra Government had agreed to provide creches near the suburban railway stations in Bombay. The women working in the readymade garment mills organised themselves. The women employees in the Bombay Municipal Corporation demanded a claim to give employment to a woman successor of a retired male employee. Because of the increasing mechanical developments in the Electronics Companies many women were deprived of their jobs. Women were given jobs on contract basis to avoid regular employment to them. These women became aware of this & approached the women labour organisations to demand their legitimate rights as employees. The Air Hostesses Union had filed a suit against the management for the partial treatment given to the men & women employees. The women began to participate in the meetings, which were held during the office hours. In 1985 Dharna to the Accounts General & Income Tax office all
the women members participated. This movement spread not only in Bombay but in Maharashtra. Especially the women workers in the agricultural fields also organised themselves for equal pay to equal work & other rights.

However, this does not give a true picture. The actual practices bring some bare facts which are essential to be mentioned. Though women participate in the mass agitation programmes and in strikes, once the agitation is over, they again go back to their jobs & household duties. There is no consistency of women's participation in the trade union activities. They cannot devote their timings regularly, cannot do extra work apart from their office hours. Thus, women participate in such activities, but are apathetic to have firm commitment to the trade union activities. [Gawankar R., P.211]

Unless compelled by the union, the majority of women would avoid participation in meetings & rallies. They seldom demand protection of their long term interests & employment potential [Ramaswamy U., P.8]

A few women elites, in their interviews had opined that family responsibilities compel a woman to devote her timings for household duties. She remains disinterested in the trade union activities. Shri Vasant Tulpule, President of Mill Mazdoor Sabha, Bombay had opined that women are loyal to
the union, on occasions they bring their complaints & grievances to the union. [Tulpule V., Interview.]

Smt. Manda Patil, a Chair person, Women's Cell of Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sabha, had opined that, in the Textile mill strike of 1982, which continued for two years, the women used to come to their offices & then they were taken to the places of morchas or dharanas. The women had wholeheartedly supported during this time. [Patil M., Interview]

The participation of women in the activities, would definitely increase in the times to come.

iv) Participation Of Women In The Trade Unions As The Organisers & By Taking The Responsibility of Some Units:

The reponsibility to work as organisers in the trade union activities is found only in certain cases, who are the top elite women, like Smt. Ahilya Rangnekar, Smt. Rosa Despande, Smt.Tara Reddy etc. Having worked for a number of years in the trade union activities these elite women felt it necessary to have a separate women cell or unit within the sphere of trade union to solve the women's problems. As a result all the trade unions have established seperate women cell or unit. Most of these women units have women office bearers.
The women section of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha has been working to face the challenges of time to bring women workers equal to the status of men in the trade union movement, at the working place & in the society. Women worker's special training programmes, documentation & dissemination of information has been adopted as tools to create amongst women a new awakening about their rights to self-assertion. The women section also arranges from time to time, training programmes, demonstrations etc. HMS every year celebrates International Women's Day & undertakes Research activities. [Report, Hind Mazdoor Sabha, 24th Biennial Convention, 23rd to 25th March, 1990, P.53]

The Indian National Trade Union Congress [INTUC] has also its women committee. Maharashtra INTUC women's committee consists of eleven members who are women. [Pradhan C., Interview]

The Mill Mazdoor Sabha, (MMS) had its women cell earlier. But as the strength of the women members miserably reduced to 2½ the women cell is now not operative. [Tulpule V., Interview]

The Central Indian Trade Union [CITU] has established its women cell during the decade with a view to increase the membership of women & tackle the problems of women. [Rangnekar A., Interview]
The Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh [BMS] had established its women cell in 1980 & women are made office bearers of it. [Gokhale, G., Interview]

All these trade unions conduct training programmes for workers in which the women representatives are sent. The output however is not as per the expectation.

v) Participation Of Women In The Trade Unions As The Office Bearers & In The Decision Making Processes:

Many trade union leaders confess that the higher positions are offered to women either to pacify them or to convey a progressive image of the union rather than any expectation of significant contribution by them. Most of the women leaders are found especially in the departments where women workers are concentrated. They perform their functions limited to their immediate domain. A common complaint is that they seldom take interest in wider issues or conditions elsewhere in the industry. This myopic concern with their immediate work environment has earned them a poor reputation among the general run trade unionists. [Ramaswamy U., P.9]

One of the ways to have women office bearers in the trade unions is to incorporate them in the organisation of the

In RMMS out of forty seven executive committee members four were women. During the decade Smt. Emilie D'Souza was a treasurer. In 1977 she was the Vice-President of RMMS. Smt. Tarabai Hirlekar, Smt. Parvati Chavan also worked as the Vice-Presidents. During 1982-1983, strike period of RMMS, Smt. Laxmibai Sawant, Smt. Shalini Nikam, Smt. Mandakini Patil, Smt. Surekha Chavan were on the executive committee.

In the BMS, since 1980, after every three years a women's conference is held at the national level. At the state level it is held after every two years with the help of International Labour Organisation. BMS had established Shramik Sangh, especially for the women A seminar was organised in 1986 at Delhi to study the problems of women workers, women office bearers whole heartedly participated in it.

The above information indicates that the strength of women as office bearers is not in proportion to the percentage of women members. The number of women participating in the decision making processes is certainly very low in all the trade unions.
On the basis of these five categories of participation of women in the trade union activities discussed above, Section 8.4 highlights on the role of elite women in the trade unions & in the women's labour organisations.

8.4 The Role Of Elite Women In The Trade Unions & In The Women's Labour Organisations:

The role & participation of women in different trade unions in general is discussed so far. The percentage of working women in Maharashtra ranges between 30% to 35%. Though the percentage of women as members of the trade unions is low [6% to 8%], due to the increasing high percentage of working women it has become necessary to solve working women's problems & increase their percentage as the members of the trade unions. Hence women's labour movement became the important field of work to the political elite women. The problems of women workers are different from men workers. The sex stereotyped image of women in the eyes of men becomes the greatest obstacle for women wherever they work. The women workers sometimes had to bow even to the evil devices of the officials & they did not even report against the officials exploiting them & taking undue advantage of their position, fearing that they might not displease the boss & thus be unsure of continuance of their jobs as well as of further promotions. [Kapur p., P.110]

The problems of women workers like latrines, ladies rooms, maternity & abortion leave are faced by women. Even office tours,
transfers bring obstacles in the women's employment. Family responsibilities permanently bring limitations to women. All these factors were considered as important factors & hence political elite women felt it necessary to pay their attention specifically to women's issues. It becomes necessary to highlight the involvement of the communist & Socialist elite women in the Women's labour movement.

Knowing the vast scope for these activities, these women began to organise women's organisations like Shramik Mahila Samiti, Self Employed Women's Association [SEWA]. These were the women's organisations dominated by the communist elite women.

The second group of elite women who involved themselves in the trade union activities was of socialist thought. These women were interested in the constructive planned programme for the benefit of working women rather than actually participating in the women's labour movement. However, the women working in the trade unions are less in number. A few names like Dr. Leela Alvaris, Smt. Maniben Kara were prominently figured who had consistently worked under the trade unions. The Hind Mazdoor Sabha & Mill Mazdoor Sabha were mainly socialist dominated trade unions. INTUC is more active in the textile mills in which women employees are more. However, the participation of women in the trade union activities is limited. Smt. Emilie D'Silva, Smt. Taramati Hirlekar were a few women elites who actively work for INTUC. The Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh also incorporates a few women.
The women influenced by the socialist thought formed organisations like Shramik Mahila Sabha, Annapurna which are run by women and which work for women.

The participation & the role of elite women in the labour movement & in the trade unions is studied in brief as (A) The Trade Unions & the role of elite women. (B) Women's labour organisations & The role of elite women.

A) Trade Unions & The Role Of Elite Women:

i) **Indian National Trade Union Congress**: Established in 1947, INTUC is the biggest trade union in India. INTUC is formed to establish an order of society which is free from hindrance in the way of all-round development of its individual members. The office bearers largely consist of men in capacity as President, Vice-President, organising secretaries & members. In Maharashtra, two hundred & fifty unions affiliated to INTUC are actively working & in Bombay the number is eighty. In Bombay, a few active trade unionists like Smt. Emilie D'Silva, Smt. Shanta Hirlekar had contributed their role by leading the women. The 1982 textile mill strike showed the active support of women in the organised efforts for the welfare of the employees [Pradhan C., Interview]
2) **Hind Mazdoor Sabha** - established in 1948 HMS aims to promote the economic, political, social & cultural interests of the Indian working people & to safeguard the interests of the Indian working people & to safeguard the interests & rights of workers in all matters relating to their employment.

The office bearers of HMS consists of President, Vice-Presidents, General & other secretaries, a treasurer & other members. In Maharashtra there are one hundred & fifty eight affiliated trade unions & in Bombay there are thirty, in Transport, Railways, Air India, Indian Air Lines and Docks. Except Air India & Indian Air Lines, women as office bearers are less.

Smt. Shanta Vaidya is successfully working as the Director of the Research Unit of HMS. She has an objective approach towards union activities. To her, participation of women is increasing but it has remained limited to the participation level. Only women's committee is essential because simple problems of women can be solved by women in such committees.

To have more participation of women, some percentage of reservation in the national executive committee of the trade union is essential according to her. HMS is quite ahead in this regard to include two or three women in the national executive. [Since 1988 the President of HMS is a woman, Smt. Kamal Sinha][Vaidya S., Interview]
iii) **Mill Mazdoor Sabha** - Established in 1947, MMS aims to establish order of democratic socialist society & increasing association of workers in the administration. The MMS is active in synthetic, handloom & hosiery industries. The strength of women workers decreased due to modern technology & automatic machines.

According Shri Vasant Tulpule, the President of MMS of Maharashtra branch, new employment to women in synthetic, handloom & hosiery is an impossibility because of the modern technology. Only the women who are already working are continued. The women are sent to the Training Programmes. In 1984-85, Textile workers Asian Regional Organisation Conference was held in Tokyo in which one woman representative represented it.

iv) **The Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh** - Established in 1955, the BMS is active in thirteen major public sectors having thirty three lakhs as its members with 30% women members in it. In conformity with its nationalist ideals, BMS preferred to follow only legitimate means to achieve their ends & use the strike weapon as the last resort. The office bearers are mainly men, & in women's cell women work as office bearers. Smt. Geeta Gokhale is the active worker of women cell of Bombay. She regularly visits different units of BMS in Bombay & try to solve the problems of women workers. [Gokhale G., Interview] The Bhartiya Postal Employee's Federation is
affiliated to the BMS in which participation of women is quite high. Smt. Shobha Shetty was the assistant secretary now. According to her participation of women is growing day by day with increasing awareness generated in them after 1980. [Shetty S., Interview]

Gharelu Kamgar Sanghatana works for organising the workers from the lower strata who perform domestic work in the houses. The sanghatana covers all such workers employed in Greater Bombay. Smt. Sulbha Ghule is the active worker of this sanghatana & takes keen interest in solving the problems of domestic workers. [Ghule S., Interview]

v) Congress of Indian Trade Union – Established in 1970, CITU is an all India level trade union. CITU believes that the exploitation of the working class can be ended only by socialising all means of production distribution & exchange & establishing a socialist state & the enlargement of the worker's rights & liberties. [Constitution of CITU, P.1 & 2] In Maharashtra, CITU has twenty branches of which six are actively working in Bombay. The office bearers are mainly men, the percentage of women office bearers is maximum 5%. The Women's Coordination Committee deals with special problems faced by women. Women are sent for legal training courses. The active trade unionists are Smt. Suman Sanzgiri, Asha Vartak who take keen interest in the activities of the union. Smt. Ahilya Rangnekar is the Vice President. In Kanak
industries, two girls were suspended on the ground that they used to smile all the time during the office hours. To protest against this one day all the women workers went to the office with a shouting cry & stated that they should be given promotion because they cry. This agitation brought desired result & the girls were employed again. [Rangnekar A., Interview]

vi) The All India Trade Union Congress: (AITUC)

Established in 1917 AITUC commits itself to the establishment of a socialist state in India & to bring about the socialisation & nationalisation of the means of production, distribution & exchange & also recognises as its goal to be, "to improve the economic & social conditions of the working class, to watch, promote & safeguard the interests, right & privileges of the workers in all matters pertaining to their employment. Further the AITUC is also committed to secure & maintain for the workers various freedoms & rights ". Since 1947 with the gradual exit of the non-communist trade unionists from it, the AITUC has come to be founded exclusively on the ideology of communism & to function as a mass front of CPI.

The CPI had formally split in 1964 & a new CPI(Left) as opposed to the old CPI styled as CPI(Right) emerged. But the AITUC continued to be the trade union front of both parties until 1970. During 1970-71 an important section of the
communists broke away & formed yet another Central trade union organisation namely CITU. [Chatterji R., P.120 & 143]

The brief study of these trade unions indicate that the participation of women in the trade unions is very limited. The participation of women must be increased through sustained & deliberate efforts.

B) Women's Labour Organisations & The Role Of Elite Women:

As stated earlier, a necessity to form women labour organisation was felt, by a few elite trade unionists. Such organisations aim to give economic justice to women. A few women labour organisations are briefly described below:

i) Maharashtra Rajya Shramik Mahila Samiti:

The women workers of all political parties are the members of it, still it is dominated by the Communist party women. Since its establishment it aims at organising women from all sectors & providing them equal rights & equal opportunities. The Samiti consists of a President, four Vice Presidents, two secretaries, four joint secretaries & a treasurer. The samiti had organised the women workers from rural & urban areas, teachers, nurses, social workers & manual workers. A few problems of women were taken to the Government. The Government, through a committee established for this purpose, brought some changes. The women
traveling by S.T. Bus were allowed to enter from the first door during the peak hours. The Samiti also provides legal & financial help to the needy women. [Rangnekar A., Interview]

ii) Bhartiya Mahila Federation:

Established in 1933, the Federation is purely a non-political women's organisation aiming at uplift of women. The Federation has more than two & a half lakh membership. The Federation aims at establishing social, economic, political & cultural equality for women by solving the problems of working women in all the sectors. The Federation compelled the Government to amend the laws related to marriage, inheritance adoption etc. by making the laws favourable to women. It also tries to provide job opportunities to rural women. The state branch of Federation is in Bombay.

The Federation tries to provide day care centres & creches near the offices & factories etc. To relieve women from the household burden, it emphasises on the regular supply of gas, water, kerosene etc. These women also insist upon special provision for women workers shift duties. The Federation coordinates its work with Shramik Mahila Samiti in Maharashtra. It publishes its small booklets every year in different languages. [Gawankar R., P.219]
iii) **Self Employed Women's Association:**

SEWA was formed in 1972 as a non-political organisation of women. It is a national level organisation having co-ordination with a few elite women of Bombay. The word self employed women stands to describe the millions of women workers outside the organised workers. These women are large in number & form important & essential segment of our economy. Since 1975 women's labour movement became more wide in its scope & women's organisations such as the All India Women's Conference, Mahila Samities, Mahila Mandals, Mahila Samaj were established. Even the feminist indirectly supported women's labour movement. [Shramshakti, P.100 & 101]

iv) **Shramik Mahila Sabha:**

Established in 1965, the Sabha aims to solve working women's problems & conditions. It specifically deals with problems of women from slum areas. It consists of women of Communist & Socialist parties.

The Sabha has established creches & Day Care Centres for slum area children to bring discipline, to provide nutritious food & to inculcate hygiene in them. The Sabha mainly pays its attention to the development of working mother's children. Many reforms in the slum areas by the corporation took place due to the
consistent efforts made by these women. Due to their efforts The Maharashtra Slum Areas Clearance & Re-development Act, 1970, was passed. Simultaneously this Sabha demands some rights to women like maternity leave, creches, necessary provisions to women at the working places, job opportunities in technical & mechanical work, hostels for working women etc. The work of the Sabha is thus totally different from that of other women organisations.

V) Annapurna:

Established in 1975 by an active Communist Party(I) woman elite Smt. Prema Purav, it is a non-political organisation. It aims at providing work to those women who were removed from textile mills from Bombay. These women provide roti & vegetables to the workers. In the beginning only fourteen women members took advantage of this organisation & today it has more than five thousand women working on daily wages. Bank of Baroda had given a loan of Rs. 1 Crore to Annapurna. The members are successful in providing job opportunities to the needy women & an intense urge for many of the social reforms like removing illiteracy, family planning, creating awareness etc. was created in them.
A brief study of these women organisations indicate that the need to solve the working women's problems became the need of the time. The decade opened a new phase to create an awareness towards women's issues. The trade unions & the women's labour organisation specifically work to safeguard the interests of the women. However social restraints still compel women to remain apathetic & disinterested. Though the union meetings are held during the lunch time, the women cannot devote their time to actively participate & to make efforts to organise the union or an organisation. This situation needs to be changed.

8.5 Conclusions & Suggestions:

Women's active participation in the trade union is not getting momentum. The women leaders have expressed in their interviews that as long as their office work is concerned, they do it honestly, but they cannot wait longer for union meetings, morchas or strikes due to their home responsibilities. Even the study camps which are arranged for women, the responses are very poor. The women are still apathetic to participate in the trade union activities.

The women's labour organisations grew after independence. Though the employment of women began in pre-independence era, the idea to build a wide movement was not developed. The women were not educated & were mainly employed in the textile mills & chemical
factories. Today the movement is already active but women are overburdened with the office work & household responsibilities. The nature & type of employment of women in the pre-independence era & in the post independence era had totally changed. The social system of the past & of the today has undergone some changes. The women in the past were illiterate but used to actively participate, the same intensity is not found among the women of today who are educated & are the members of the trade unions. Women have become more self-centred & money orientated. They join the employment to add to their family income & they remain disinterested in the rest of the activities of their working places or of the unions. As long as this attitude does not change the active participation of women would never be foreseen.

1. The trade unionism in India is a recent phenomenon & the participation of women in the trade unions is very recent. The women are not yet attracted to the trade unions though the number of working women increases day by day. The women have become conscious of their rights but are reluctant to voice them through the trade unions.

2. The participation of women in terms of membership & in terms of participating in the mass activities also needs to be improved. In most cases membership is compulsory. That is why on record women members are registered. If the trade union activities are conducted during the office hours, women join it otherwise they prefer to remain absent on such
occasions. In a city like Bombay where travelling involves much hardships, women definitely prefer to go home rather than passing their time in such extra work.

3. Trade unions are hardly successful in appointing women at the level of position or as office bearers. However when women are less in number, one cannot expect women working at officiating level. The inclusion of women may not be possible also because of the overburdening & complex procedures of union activities.

4. In the initial stages trade unions were not aware of the problems of women employees. But as the strength of women workers increased, each trade union formed its own unit for women & brought women's issues through these units. The elite women were on the forefront in such units & they attracted more women towards it.

5. The women's labour movement became more active, aggressive & militant during the decade. The women from organised & unorganised sectors, from rural & urban areas, educated & uneducated were brought under this movement & a network of such organisations would definitely become more active in the years to come.

6. The strength of elite women trade unionists is very limited. Except a few names quoted earlier, names of other
women are not found, who would lead the women workers who form 33% labour force, remains a basic question in this regard. The women elites, however, have played their role honestly & devoted their whole life for this purpose.

7. Trade unions now have become aware of women's issues & problems. An overall attempt is made to improvise the situation through trade unions, women's labour movement, through the Government & through women's labour organisations. These organisations have undertaken a wide perspective towards women's problems from their womanhood to their household responsibilities.

Suggestions:

1. Family responsibilities should be shared equally between men & women. The biased views against women should be abolished. Women should be treated with an equal eye by her family members.

2. A woman should be made aware of her own existence & identity. She should be brought out of her traditional sacrificing model role.

3. Women must have the right & the opportunity to plan their families & to choose motherhood freely. The maternity protection should be there to safeguard the health & welfare
of mother & child & prevent women workers from being economically penalised on account of their giving birth to children. The working women who give birth to a child should be granted sufficient compensation for loss of earnings during the maternity period of at least three months.

4. Trade union structures should be revised in response to the aspirations of women workers. The participation of women at the decision making levels of trade unions should be in accordance with the women members.

5. Appropriate bodies should be set up at all the levels of the trade union structures to analyse the problems faced by women workers, to propose solutions, eliminate discrimination against them & encourage their participation in the trade union activities. Where such bodies are not in existence they should be created without delay.

6. Training programmes for women only should be undertaken as positive actions within the trade unions.

7. Trade unions should select their recruitment methods in accordance with specific problems of women.

8. Women workers should come out of their traditional role not by giving it up totally but by making compromises. They should be firm to commit themselves to the trade union
activities as a part of office duty. Apathy, disinterest & pleasure seeking attitude should be substituted to active participation, consciousness & determination of mind towards their own rights & duties & responsibilities.

9. The trade unions & women's labour organisations should co-ordinate their activities & women political elites should act as link to these two.

10. To increase the participation of women, special provisions to ensure their participation either through the creation of additional seats or by co-option. These seats should not be consultative or token seats but should be accompanied with equal rights & responsibilities.