CHAPTER 2

Growth of Trade Unions in Textile Industry

In the previous chapter we have given a brief outline about the emergence of the modern textile industry in Ahmedabad on the firm base provided by the indigenous economic system of the city. In the present chapter, we shall discuss how trade unions of various types have come to be formed among the mill workers of this industry.

But before we focus our attention on the trade unions in Ahmedabad, we shall first discuss trade union movement in India as a whole, in order to appreciate its broad characteristics. This, in turn will help us understand textile trade unions in Ahmedabad in a better manner.

Trade Union Movement in India:

Writing about trade unions, G.D.H. Cole (1953:34) has remarked that, "in each country, trade unionism is shaped not only by the form and stage of economic development but also by the political conditions and by the general structure of the society in which it has to act." A historical narration of Indian trade union movement must therefore take into account the socio-economic and political realities, to the extent they have influenced its growth.

Historical descriptions of Indian trade union movement are ably presented by many authors. (cf. Punekar, 1948; Karnik, 1966; Oranti, 1965) Presently, we shall not go into the details
of the historical development but shall pinpoint only those forces and events which have given a decisive turn and distinctive character to the movement.

The Initial Phase:

In the initial period of industrialization in India, the country was politically under the British rule. As a colonial power, the British were not very keen to develop industries on a large scale. Kingsley Davis (1951:217) points out, how the tariff policy favoured British interests; the organizational and rate structure (transport) favoured port towns, and handicraft industries in India were ruined, so that British interests could be served. Economically, India was a poor country and the few industries that developed had to face the problem of market because of the low purchasing power of average Indian. On one side, industrial development was slow, while on the other side, there was surplus labour because of the increase in population. This made the position of workers very weak vis-a-vis the owners. On the side of labour force, there were many limitations. To begin with, most of the workers had come from villages to work in industries. With their rural background, it was difficult for them to adjust to the urban-industrial way of life which emphasized a different type of work-discipline, not usually found in villages. It was not possible for trade unions to develop until the labour force had become stable and permanent. The time-lag between
the establishment of modern industries (the first cotton mill was established in 1853 in Bombay) and modern trade unions (the first trade union, on modern line was organized in 1918 in Madras) (Karnik; 1966:23) has to be seen in the context of this problem of adjustment. Secondly, the workers who had come to industries were, by and large, poor, ignorant, backward and unskilled. They were not in a position to form unions on their own. Thirdly, these workers were divided on the basis of caste, religion, region and language. These primordial interest groups also prevented the development of class-consciousness, which is an essential pre-condition for trade union organization.

From the employers' side also the situation was not favourable. Wages were low; hours of work were very long; working conditions and treatment by the employers were inhuman. The employers had the full right to hire and fire workers at their own sweet will. If there was any protest from the workers, such workers who were found to be leaders were dismissed or victimized. Employers used to spy, blacklist, bribe and physically assault workers who showed any tendency toward unionization.

The then British government had also adopted a policy which encouraged employers as against the workers. This was partly because, many of the early industrialists were Britishers or the Europeans. Partly, it was due to their policy of non-intereference. It should, however, be admitted that the British
did change their policy later on, and enacted various Acts which provided for better working conditions for workers.

The British Trade Union leaders were responsible for bringing pressure upon the British government to take a sympathetic attitude toward trade unions in India. The Manchester and Lancheshire lobbies also asked government to regulate hours of work as well as wages for workers. This was in order to serve their own interests but indirectly they helped the cause of labour. Later, after the first world war, the International Labour Organization (ILO) also prescribed conditions and gave guidelines to the member-states as to how they should deal with the problems of workers and their organization. India, being a member-state, had to honour the policy laid down by ILO.

Thus, the limitations on the part of workers as well as the anti-union policy of the employers did not provide a very favourable atmosphere for the development of trade unions. However, the oppressive and inhuman conditions of work did evoke sporadic protests and resentment by the workers toward their employers. Such acts of protests were treated more as problem of law and order by the government than as problems which required bilateral solution.

Compared to the western counterpart, Indian workers were relatively less educated and less committed. They also received lower wages than what the workers in western countries were getting. Moreover, in terms of the social equality, the western workers enjoyed more of it than their Indian counterpart, because of the rigid caste system prevalent in India. Therefore, the
British trade unions had high membership rate and their financial base was also sound. The social inequality of Indian caste system coupled with the traditional paternalism of Indian employers and the lack of self-confidence among the workers made it difficult for the latter to organize themselves and present their problems before the employers. In such a situation when workers were in need of leaders, some of the educated middle-class persons came forward and provided the much needed leadership. The pioneers of labour movement—men like Sorabji Shapuri, Lokhande and Bengalee—were social workers who were attracted toward this movement out of a mission of mercy and charity (Karnik 1960: 29). Consistent with their orientations, their attempts were more ameliorative and welfare oriented than to secure justice for the workers.

The Bombay Mill-hands Association established in 1890 was the first of this type of trade union established by Lokhande. Though there used to be strikes by the workers when situation compelled them to do so, the trade union leaders-cum-social workers largely used the method of petitions and memorials to press their demands. The workers, riven by the caste and communal differences, presented a heterogeneous mass with no strong loyalties for their organizations.

Freedom Movement and Trade Unions:

The point of departure came at a time when the freedom movement was converted into a mass movement by Gandhiji. The workers, like members of other sections of society, were enjoined by the national leaders to strive for political freedom first.
Thus began the political involvement of trade unions which had a far reaching influence on their character. Gandhiji helped workers of Ahmedabad to organize the famous TLA. We shall discuss more about it later in this chapter. It needs only to be pointed out here, that Gandhiji used his moral principles in the organization of TLA and in doing so, provided a different model of trade union which was in some respect different from the conventional trade union. In Madras, B.P. Wadia organized a trade union of mill-workers, which turned out to be a highly successful organization with almost cent percent membership. Wadia himself was a moderate leader, and rather than ask members of his union to declare strike, he was a restraining influence (Duffy; 1964:27). However, management filed a suit against Wadia when a strike was declared and in the absence of any legal protection, he was prosecuted in 1920. The Wadia episode impressed upon the trade union leaders the need for some kind of legal protection. Eventually in 1926, the Indian Trades Union Act was passed which inter alia protected trade union leaders from any legal action against their lawful activities as trade union leaders.

In 1929, the government wanted to send representatives of trade unions to participate in the ILO deliberations. Since there was no central organization to represent labour, 'All-India Trade Union Congress' (AITUC) was formed in 1929. The manner in which this all-India body was formed, left the constituent units weak because, before the latter felt the need for a central body, such a body was formed.
Around 1926, the Communists became active among industrial workers and there were number of strikes organized by them. The AITUC leadership also came to be dominated by the Communists. This led the non-Communist leaders to form a different organization in 1930, called the Indian Trades Union Federation. Thus started fragmentation of trade unions on political lines.

Before Independence, protective legislation in the form of Factories Acts (1881, 1891, 1911 and 1934), Payment of Wages Act (1936), Workman's Compensation Act (1923) etc. were enacted for industrial workers. These enactments were not the result of any pressure from the workers' organizations but due to extraneous factors such as the pressure from the British trade unions, British industrialists, and ILO.

Trade Unions in Post-independence Phase:

The post-independence period brought about a significant change in the economic and political situation of the country. Along with the goal of stabilising democratic polity, the new government of independent India had to work for economic modernization of the country. Whereas, in the West, the economic development was largely carried out by private owners, in India, it was one of the major functions of the government. Therefore, the government rather than the industrialists had to face the problems of workers and since the government is run by a political party, political bias was added to the economic demands of the workers. During this period, trade union federations on party
lines also came into existence, because industrial workers as a growth sector provided an organized segment which, according to political party leaders, could be influenced with greater ease compared to rural masses. The political freedom which India achieved, has also heightened the expectation of workers for higher wages and better working conditions. The economic betterment requires expansion of industrial base which in turn, requires saving and thus putting restraints on the immediate, short-term demands for the realization of long-term goals. In such a situation trade union leaders are expected to play what Ashok Mehta (1960: 87-106) calls a 'mediating role.' This in other words means that trade union leaders should impress upon their members the need for increased production and restraint on their short-term consumptionist demands.

As a welfare state, the government has also enacted legislation to protect the interests of the working class. The Factories Act 1948 is a comprehensive piece of legislation which regulates the hours of works as well as provides specifications about facilities to be provided in the mills. The Minimum Wages Act 1948, The Employers' Provident Fund Act, 1952, The Employers (State Insurance Act: 1948) are some of the Acts which provide protection in terms of workers' economic interests. The Industrial Dispute Act 1948 falls in a different category of legislation. It tries to provide machinery-conciliation, voluntary and compulsory arbitration - for the settlement of industrial disputes. It also puts restriction on the workers' right to strike during the pendency of conciliation or arbitration proceedings. The objective behind the Act is
to minimize loss of production due to strike and to help workers because their own unions are weak. This argument has evoked enough controversy and those who think that industrial disputes should be settled bilaterally only, i.e. through collective bargaining, argue that the present legislation does not allow trade unions to grow. Kennedy has underlined the weakness of the legislation by characterizing it as a paternalistic attempt by the government (1966:61-62).

Characteristics of Indian Trade Unions:

The foregoing discussion was intended to bring forth the emergent general characteristics of Indian trade unions as a result of the historical forces. We can briefly note some of these characteristics:

1. **Amorphousness:**

   Most of the unions lack organization because the members are not stable and do not pay their subscription regularly. Only the office and the self-appointed leader indicate the existence of the union. In short, it is all head and no body.

2. **Fragmentation:**

   As a result of the emergence of various trade unions on political lines, trade unions tend to be small, weak and many in number. The workers are divided into many small unions thus decreasing their collective strength.

3. **Weak financial base:**

   Since there are many small unions, the members' subscription - which itself is irregular - adds up to a very small amount, from which no worthwhile activities can be carried on.
4. **Outside leadership:**

The limitations of workers, the prevailing social inequalities and the difficulty of language and complexity of labour legislation - all these together require an outsider instead of an insider to run the union.

5. **Political unionism:**

The outsiders are mostly politicians belonging to political parties. The trade union activities are largely political activities and even economic demands of the members assume political character. There are few independent unions,1 no doubt, but their influence is not much.

6. **Lack of collective bargaining:**

Collective bargaining which is a dominant mode of settling labour-management disputes in the West is very rarely used by trade unions in India. There are collective demands but no collective bargaining. Instead, arbitration is resorted to, and is accepted by trade union leaders as well as employers.

The characteristics of Indian trade unions which are described above, are general ones. For a country as vast as India, there are bound to be some exceptions. From these characteristics one may get an impression that the small, fragmented and economically weak unions may not be very effective. But this is not the case. The unions are backed by the political parties and as such they do not remain closed organizations of workers only but have become mass organizations and therefore warrant attention.
Ahmedabad textile trade unions share the general characteristics of Indian trade unions, in that with one or two exceptions, they are small, financially weak and organized on political party lines.

The trade unions included in the study are registered trade unions. The following table provides information about their names, abbreviations used in the study, their date of registration and the political party to which they are affiliated.

**Table No 2.1  List of Trade Unions in the Present Study.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Union</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Date of Registration</th>
<th>Central Organization</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textile Labour Association</td>
<td>TLA</td>
<td>26.7.1939*</td>
<td>Nil, formerly with INTUC</td>
<td>National Labour Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Union</td>
<td>Indicate</td>
<td>20.11.1970</td>
<td>INTUC</td>
<td>Congress (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalvavta Mill Kamdar Union</td>
<td>Lalvavta</td>
<td>31.7.1972</td>
<td>AITUC</td>
<td>CPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maha Gujarat Mill Mazdoor Union</td>
<td>Maha Gujarat</td>
<td>13.4.1964</td>
<td>CITU</td>
<td>CP (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Mandal</td>
<td>Mandal</td>
<td>15.1.1953</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sarni Kamdar Association</td>
<td>Sarni</td>
<td>13.1.1949</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Sangh</td>
<td>Sangh</td>
<td>20.7.1962</td>
<td>BMS</td>
<td>Jan Sangh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Various units of TLA were registered on different dates. Here, the date of the unit which was registered first is given.
When trade unions in textile industry are discussed, the name of TLA dominates like a huge banyan tree. In fact, the size, significance and the effectiveness of the organization, coupled with the association of Gandhiji as its leader in its infancy, create a situation in which the non-TLA unions tend to be neglected as non-entities. But this is not a proper perspective. The non-TLA unions do exist and in spite of their small size, they did have their impact felt on the industrial life of Ahmedabad.

Presently, we shall discuss how each of these unions has developed, though it should be admitted at the outset that excepting TLA, it was difficult for rest of the unions to provide systematic information about their past. This is largely due to the fact that they cannot afford to have full-time office-staff to look after their routine work. On the other hand, TLA has wealth of information, which, it seems, has not been fruitfully used so far.

The pre-union period:

The first textile mill was established in 1861, while TLA, the first union to be organized among the mill workers was established in 1918, thus leaving a span of over fifty years without any union. As was stated in the previous chapter, this time-lag was due to workers' inability to adjust to the new culture of industry and was not a special feature of Ahmedabad industry only. However, it is of interest to know as to the type of conditions which prevailed during this pre-union period. Not enough information is available regarding the working conditions in the mills. But TLA has published a booklet
in Gujarati. It is titled 'Mahajan nahotu tyare' i.e. 'When Mahajan (TLA) Did not Exist' and it records experiences of four workers who had worked during this pre-union period.

According to this booklet, the hours of work were from 6.30 a.m to 7.00 p.m or from daybreak to sunset. Wages were very low. A doffer used to get Rs.5/- per month. Similarly, an oilman was given Rs.10/- per month and the jobber who was all-powerful was given Rs.30/- per month. There was scarcity of workers, so it was not difficult to get job in the mill. Since jobs were available and wages were very low, women and children were also working in the mills. Children above twelve years were employed for half a day only, and so many boys were working in two different mills during the day.

To get to the mills in time, men, women and children had to get up very early. Women had to cook food, so they used to get up around 4.00 a.m. There was no recess and workers had to find time to gulp their food (which consisted of loaves and chilies) while attending their machines. Those who could come to the mills at 5.00 a.m. were given an extra pai (1/300th part of a rupee). Toward the end of the day, when the mills were closed, workers had to reach home in darkness because there were no street lights. They used to go in groups with the help of lighted bamboo sticks, the ends of which were tied with rags of cloth dipped in kerosene.

The recruitment was through jobber. Workers were recruited on the basis of caste and region. The jobber often used to punish workers physically. In some cases, he used to take undue liberty
with the female workers or with the wives of the workers. He also used to accept bribe from workers when the latter were given jobs in the mills or when they wanted leave to go to their native place. The workers had no contact with the owners of the mills and the jobber was the immediate authority for them. The loyalty of the workers to their jobber was so much that it was not uncommon for the workers to leave the mill en masse and go to another mill with him.

Besides low wages, working conditions in the mills were far from satisfactory. There was no arrangement for drinking water, dining hall and canteen. Arbitrary deductions from wages were made and if there was any damage in the cloth, the worker had to purchase the cloth and sell it in the market. Workers belonging to scheduled castes were not allowed to enter other departments.

Life outside the mill was equally difficult. The workers used to live in small mud houses which had no ventilation. There were no street lights, latrines and water taps. Once in a week, women used to go to the river to wash clothes. There were frequent quarrels in the workers' families because men used to drink liquor and spend money in gambling.

By and large, the workers used to accept the inhuman and humiliating conditions of work with a sense of resignation but at times when the situation became unbearable, they used to leave work and come out of their mills. The mill-owners were not enlightened enough to understand the problems of workers. The spontaneous strikes by the workers were termed as 'hoolad' or riot and for the government it was a problem of law and order.
Sometimes the workers used to go to the nearby 'Chandola' lake from where they were brought back after persuasion.

Such a situation continued for well over fifty years.

It was strange to note that Ahmedabad which was different in many ways from other industrial centres like Bombay and Calcutta was not much different in terms of its treatment to the workers. Just as the pioneers of modern textile industry were persons who had come in close contact with the British, the pioneer of first trade union in Ahmedabad was also a person who had come in close contact with the liberal philosophy of the British.

**Birth of TLA**

Ansuyaben Sarabhai who is credited with the initial attempts to establish trade union among the mill workers of Ahmedabad, was sister of a leading mill-owner, Ambalal Sarabhai. Like the uniqueness of the emergence of textile industry in Ahmedabad, Ansuyaben's leadership in trade union is also unique, because, nowhere in India has a near relative of millowners identified so closely with the workers. Ansuyaben, who was impressed by the social service ideals of the Fabian society, was very much pained to see the sad plight of the mill-workers, many of whom were members of scheduled castes and as such were discriminated against, in many walks of life. When she started working among the workers, she confined her activities to (1) education (2) health and medical care (3) saving and cooperative society and (4) injustice by the mills regarding wages and conditions of work. Thus her approach was largely constructive and ameliorative, rather than a struggle for the rights of the workers.
In 1917, a serious plague broke out in Ahmedabad. Workers fled the city to save themselves from the jaws of death. This created serious labour shortage for mills. In order to attract workers, the millowners declared special 'plague bonus'. At that time the workers of warping department were given less than workers of other departments. The workers approached Ansuyaben to lead them in their struggle for wage increase. The strike continued for 20 days and the workers received increase of 20% in their wages (Majmudar 1970:77).

In 1918, when the plague subsided, the millowners decided to discontinue the 'plague bonus' and give 20% wage-rise, but the cost of living had gone up by that time and workers were not ready to get satisfied with this 20% rise only but wanted to put forward some higher demand. It was at this time that Gandhiji came to the scene and provided leadership. The workers had demanded 50% wage rise, but Gandhiji asked them to make 'just' demands and worked out that 35% rise was a just demand. He advised workers to maintain discipline, eschew violence and not to entertain feeling of hatred or enmity toward the mill owners. The workers took a pledge to continue their struggle until their demand was met. The mill-owners had agreed to have the problem decided by arbitration. Meanwhile, some workers of some mills declared strike. Gandhiji was not happy at the behaviour of the workers and he asked them to go back to work. But the mill-owners found this to be an excuse to back out from the arbitration and in spite of Gandhiji's assurance, they did not agree to concede the demands of workers. There was no other alternative left but
to strike. So Gandhiji gave a strike-call and the workers supported it. During the strike, some mill-owners tried to break workers’ morale. The workers found it difficult to pull on without any income. Gandhiji was moving about with his band of social workers, Ansuyaben and Shankarlal Banker, to give courage to the workers. In one of these rounds, a worker burst out against Gandhiji saying that he (i.e. Gandhiji) gets his full meal and moves about in car but they don’t have even dry loaf to eat. Gandhiji realized the pangs of the strikers and declared that he would not take food, nor would he use car till the demands of the workers are met. The fast unto death forced the millowners to come to an agreement and finally Professor Anand Shankar Dhruv, a noted scholar was appointed as arbitrator. He gave his award which gave workers 35% rise in their wages.

In the history of TLA, this dynamic and dramatic episode, involving the charismatic personality of Gandhiji has a far-reaching significance. The labour force was transformed overnight into a gigantic organized body. Inspite of the anti-union policy of many mill-owners, department-wise unions, i.e., craft unions were organized and TLA became a formidable organization of Ahmedabad mill workers. With his love for things Swadeshi (indigenous), Gandhi called this union Majoor Mahajan or guild of workers, and he wanted the guild of workers to work along with the other guilds of Ahmedabad city.

Unlike other trade unions, Gandhiji wanted to develop TLA as an indigenous trade union. He is stated to have said, “If I had my way, I will regulate all the labour organizations of India after the Ahmedabad model.” (quoted by Revri, 1972:75). Two sets of principles, one governing the
general behaviour of the workers and the other governing trade union policy are given by him. The general principles involve his insistence on truth, purity of means as well as ends, non-violence and emphasis on duties before rights. The principles concerning trade union policy include arbitration, class-collaboration as against class-conflict, trusteeship, self-sufficiency of trade union as a unit, aloofness from politics and the use of dedicated outsiders as leaders of union.

During his 'righteous struggle', Gandhiji saw to it that workers put the moral principles into action. The principles regarding trade union policy are held responsible for the successful working of TLA till today. But all these principles have come under criticism not only by the communists but by many close associates of Gandhiji also.

In the principle of voluntary arbitration, there is an overemphasis on industrial peace - and most of the TLA leaders emphasize the peaceful industrial relations of Ahmedabad Textile industry - at the cost of de-emphasizing the role of conflict. Though a critical study of TLA is yet not made, it seems that this claim for industrial peace also seems to be overstated. If we go through the records of the arbitration deliberations between the representatives of millowners and those of workers, we find that the mill-owners' representatives were not very cooperative in the settlement of industrial disputes. They were blunt in stating that they did not run the mills for the welfare of the workers but for their private profit (Majmudar; 1970:81); they were not ready to provide the financial details of the mills, without which fixation of wages cannot be discussed (Majmudar; 1970:95-96); many a times they had backed out of
the arbitration proceedings or have not implemented agreements reached (Desai; 1957: 199-244). The anti-union activities of many millowners are recorded in various booklets and pamphlets published by TLA. In one of such booklets, Ansuyaben has described the Pre-TLA period as 'reign of terror.' It is not easy to accept that the millowners were as cooperative as TLA in maintaining industrial peace.

The principle of arbitration is also criticized as being a paternalistic measure which does not allow trade unions to grow to their full strength. However, it should be admitted that, at a time when workers lacked awareness and were very backward and ignorant, arbitration was a convenient measure both for the workers as well as employers.

The trusteeship principle requires owners to assume the role of trustees and use the gains of the industry in the interest of the society. In other words, this is socializing ownership in a non-violent manner, rather than through compulsion. Gandhi believed in change of heart, but did think of the consequences of such a slow process. It is difficult to understand how Gandhi wanted owners to be trustees, when he himself was a witness to the pitiable conditions of the workers for which the owners were largely responsible. The trusteeship principle is another expression of the paternalistic orientation of Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru (quoted by Karnik; 1966:107) has characterized the idea of trusteeship as barren.

*Desai (1957:142) notes how a millowner expressed fear about the increasing educational facilities for the mill workers. He said that if the facilities continue, there won't be workers available for his mill.
and said: "For trusteeship means that the power for good or evil remains with the self-appointed trustee and he may exercise it as he wills. The sole trusteeship that can be fair is the trusteeship of the nation and not of individuals or group."

Gandhiji wanted trade unions to develop on family lines (Soman; 1957:60) and therefore in his scheme of analysis there is no place for class-hatred. Instead he emphasized class-cooperation. Admittedly, cooperation is more needed in society for its normal ongoing processes, but conflict too has its role to play. Moreover, sociologically speaking, the network of social relations in family, a small primary group, cannot be transplanted into a large-scale secondary group like trade union. Therefore the structure of trade union remains qualitatively different from that of family.

Moreover, the Indian family with its protective structure is also characterized by the authoritarian dominance of the elders and is not completely free from conflicts as is often made out to be.

In choosing their leaders, Gandhiji wanted workers not to be hoodwinked by the politicians. According to him, leaders should be dedicated and be in a position to guide workers properly. He did not want trade unions to form any federation but remain single and independent and survive on its own strength. In this case Kanji Dwarkadas (1962:21) records his meeting with Gandhiji in which he requested him to allow TLA to join AITUC. Gandhi refused saying, "What have I in Ahmedabad to do with all-India Trade Union Congress and
simply, what has the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association
to do with the all-India body?" Dwarkadas notes; "This
was a most unfortunate and wrong decision on Gandhiji's part,
because his not getting the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association
to join it, prevented the more sober opinion in labour circle
to be heard in AITUC and left the field open to more extremist,
wild and irresponsible leadership to capture the AITUC." Despite Gandhiji's idea to keep TLA free from politics, it
has not been possible to do so. TLA's link with the undivided
Congress was as clear as daylight and later on when INTUC,
a central federation backed by Congress was formed, TLA was
the moving spirit behind it and provided leadership for the new
organization. After the Congress split, INTUC was also affected
and so TLA broke away from it in 1970 and started National
Labour Organization which was later on converted into National
Labour Party (NLP) in 1972?

The real contribution of TLA lies in its constructive
and ameliorative programme which includes education, sanitation;
medical relief, cultivation of cooperative spirit by organizing
cooperative activities and abstinence from vices like drinking
and gambling. The workers who came mostly from the scheduled
castes and other backward castes benefitted a great deal from
these activities.

Present Structure of TLA:

Admittedly, TLA is the most organized and orderly union
in India. According to Bombay Industrial Relations Act 1946,
it is a recognized union in textile industry. It has maintained
a stable membership and sound financial base. The following
Table No. 7

Percentages of Total Textile Workers Who Were Members of TLA (1920-1973)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% TLA members</th>
<th>Total Textile Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>37.80</td>
<td>43,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>26.36</td>
<td>53,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>35.32</td>
<td>64,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>32.32</td>
<td>79,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>38.43</td>
<td>73,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>77.66</td>
<td>78,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>(83.901)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>(82.201)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>76.94</td>
<td>1,359,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>70.08</td>
<td>1,833,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>90.37</td>
<td>1,875,09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>91.91</td>
<td>1,307,491</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that membership percentage had remained low for the first twenty years. Thereafter, it has gone up and in the last few years more than 90% of the workers are members of TLA.

According to TLA Annual Report 1973, the total income from the annual subscription of its members was Rs. 16 lakhs and 30 thousand. The union had 200 full-timers and 135 part-timers for its manifold activities. Various institutions run by the unions are: Children's centres, Gymnasia, Reading rooms, Libraries, Study-homes, Sweing classes, Hospitals,
Maternity homes, Hostels, Cooperative bank and Khadi hat. Moreover, the union has well-developed complaint department with competent field staff. Complaints concerning Municipality, Police department and Housing board are also received by the union and a separate department maintained for such complaints.

The union brings out Majoor Sandesh, a bi-weekly newspaper for its members. The subscription rate is different for different categories of workers.

The main component units of TLA are the following:

1. The Card, Blow, Comber and Frame Workers’ union.
2. The Throstle Workers’ Union.
3. The Reelers’ Union.
4. The Winders’ Union.
6. The Weaver Workers’ Union.
8. The Dyeing, Bleaching, Calendering, Finishing, Printing and Processing Workers’ Union.
9. The Jobber and Mukadams’ Union.
10. The Clerks’ Union.
11. The Engine Mechanic, Power Plant and Electric Department Workers’ Union.
12. The Paherawalas (Watchmen), Canteen Employees and General Workers’ Union.

The government of TLA is made up of occupation-wise Representative Boards in which from among the 12 constituent units, representatives are elected for a period of 3 years on the principle of one representative for first 50 members and another one for next 75 members. From these Representatives,
A joint Representative Board is constituted in proportion to the number of representatives in each union. The joint Executive Committee or Central Executive Committee consists of one or more delegates from each unit and as far as possible proportional to the number of representatives in each unit. At the time of the study there were 115 rank and file (insiders) and 28 honourary (outsiders) members on the Executive Committee.

There is an advisory committee from which the President and the Secretaries are chosen. Smt. Ansuyaben Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Syamprasad Vasavada and Shri Khandubhai Desai were some of the eminent members of the advisory committee. The committee members are permanent ones and since the office-bearers come from this committee, such a system has come under criticism. Karnik (1966:106) has noted the charge that TLA leadership is paternalistic and does not allow insider-leadership to develop. Lipset (1969:194) who has studied trade union leadership has said: "It is necessary to recognize that many organizations may never fulfil the conditions for a stable internal democracy and still contribute in important ways to the democratic process in the total society." For a trade union member, the niceties of democracy are less important, so long as his union delivers goods. Moreover, through various committees, membership participation can be maximized and TLA has many such committees; chief among which are the complaints committee, the finance committee and the social welfare committee.
The success of TLA has been attributed to the local conditions obtained here. (cf. Mehta; 1954:285; Crouch; 1966:111; Gillion; 1968:159). The labour force and the employers belong to the same regional and linguistic group. Moreover, the businessmen's adaptability of Ahmedabad mill-owners is also well-known. And thirdly, Gandhi who established TLA had unique position among the workers as well as mill owners. Myers (1958:59) quotes Ambalal Sarabhai, the millowner, who said, "I do not want to say anything more than that if the workers revere Gandhi Saheb, the millowners do no less. On the contrary, they revere him even more."

However, in the present situation, TLA has suffered political reverses many times. This is in striking contrast to its organizational strength and constructive activities. Oza (1975:7-8) has attributed the political failure of TLA to its inability to change with times. After Gandhi, TLA leaders have not contributed any new interpretation of Gandhian principles in the face of new challenges.

A non-TLA trade union leader said that TLA gets its support largely from the scheduled caste workers. The latter support it not because of the trade union gains but because of its welfare measures. Moreover, TLA encourages caste associations of workers which tend to keep the workers divided. There is also a charge that TLA leaders are submissive to the mill-owners and instil in workers such values as submission and loyalty rather than independence and self-respect. The truth or otherwise of these points of criticism can be established if an objective study is made.
Established in December 1969, Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Union is commonly known as Indicate Union because of its affiliation with Congress (R) and membership in INTUC.

When the undivided Congress split into Congress (R) and Congress (O), INTUC which was ideologically with Congress also suffered a setback. TLA which was affiliated to INTUC, withdrew from it and this led a vacuum in INTUC. The Congress (R) leaders who had trade union background, started their own union which filled the gap left by TLA. Thus, the Indicate Union has political origin. As a rival of TLA, its leaders wanted it to take the place of TLA in the face of political reverses of the latter.

As a constituent unit of INTUC, Indicate Union follows the ideology of the former. This requires a brief outline of the development of INTUC.

As was discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, AITUC, the first all-India level federation of trade unions, gradually passed into the hands of Communist. The non-Communist trade union leaders who were feeling uncomfortable in AITUC, wanted to establish their own central body. After independence, the Congress leaders formed INTUC to which three types of trade union leaders joined: (i) The Gandhian-TLA leaders of Ahmedabad; (ii) those who were with AITUC and had experience of working at the national level; and (iii) those who had experience of political offices during 1937 Congress rule. This group cut across the former two groups. (Crouch, 1966:101-102).
The INTUC was supported by the ruling party and therefore it received a favoured treatment by the government. But as Crouch (1966:145) makes it clear, the relationship is not so simple. There are factions in the Congress as well as in INTUC and depending upon the ruling factions and the faction in INTUC, relationship of cooperation or opposition is established. Inspite of the geographical and ideological diversity in INTUC, Crouch (1966:152) characterizes it as "stronger, less militant and closer to the government in Western India whereas in the east INTUC is faced with strong competition from the Communist party which forces it to adopt a more militant posture in order to have some chance of staying in the competition."

The INTUC-Congress relationship has made the former to give primacy to national rather than sectional interest. This has also made INTUC unpopular at times among the workers.

The Indicate Union in Ahmedabad wants to provide an alternative to TLA. It has a moderately good office compared to other non-TLA unions. While the top-leaders of TLA use cars, the Indicate leaders have scooters. Other non-TLA leaders do not enjoy such luxuries and they have to make do with modest bycycles or use public transport. The local INTUC leaders as well as the Congress party leaders also extend help to Indicate Union. The Union claims to have membership ranging from 12000 to 15000. Many of the members come from the five nationalized mills because this union had played an important part in forcing government to take over these sick mills. Moreover, the Union tries to organize workers...
of the various processing units which are part of the textile industry but do not get the benefits which their mill-workers receive.

The Gujarat government had appointed a Labour Commission under the chairmanship of Justice D.M. Desai to suggest changes in the existing labour legislation. The Committee has suggested Joint Management Councils to be formed with elective positions of representatives of workers as well as management. The TLA leaders were not in favour of election. They wanted the recognized union which claims the loyalty of the majority of the workers to have the right to send its own representatives. The Indicate Union leaders, on the other hand, favoured election of workers' representatives. This has been the major propaganda offensive of the Indicate Union against TLA.

The Communist Unions

The Communist influence in trade unions in Ahmedabad, though started as early as 1934, has been very limited among the textile workers. The lack of success of Communist union is partly due to the business-minded people of Ahmedabad and partly due to the entrenched influence of TLA.

Ideologically, the Communists consider trade union as a vehicle of revolution and through it, establish dictatorship of the proletariat. In a capitalist society, therefore, "the major task of trade union is to assist in the overthrow of capitalism by organizing the working class and rousing its consciousness of its own historic role." (Crouch, 1966:156)
In India, the Communist opposition to the government—which according to Marx is supported by the capitals—has changed from time to time. During the second world war, the Indian Communists collaborated with the British government when Russia sought alliance with the British.

After the war, when India became independent, a group of Communists were ready to support the progressive measures of the Congress government. They were labelled as rightists. On the other hand, there were extremists who were not in favour of any coalition with Congress but were in complete opposition to it. In between there were some centrists who used to support some measures of Congress and oppose others.

In the context of the international Communist movement, the rightists are pro-Russian and the leftists pro-Chinese.

The AITUC followed this polarization in the party and eventually when the party split into CPI and CP(M), the federation also split in 1970. The rightists maintained control of AITUC whereas the leftists formed a new central organization called CITU (Centre of Trade Union).

Long before the split in Communist union, the Mill Kamdar Union in Ahmedabad was working among the textile workers under the leadership of Communist leader Mr. Dinkar Mehta against the powerful TLA. Inspite of the limited followers, the Mill Kamdar Union was successful in organizing strikes in many mills. Later on during 1956, Maha Gujarat Movement, the TLA sided with the government policy against the wishes of almost all sections of people of Gujarat. This also provided the Communist union to improve its chances and consolidate its base. Under the leadership of Indulal Yagnik, the non-TLA
Trade unions organized themselves into a joint front called Sangram Samiti (battle committee) and the Communist union was one of its major constituents. In 1964, in the face of rising prices, the problem of Dearness Allowance, bonus and rectification of the consumers price index, the Sangram Samiti was able to organize textile workers on a large scale. They gave a strike call but it failed. Ultimately, the TLA was able to regain its temporary loss of control and the problems of bonus and D.A. were solved satisfactorily.

The mill Kamdar Union was split into two unions in 1970. The rightist union is called Lal Vavta (Red Flag) Mill Kamdar Union and is affiliated to AITUC. The leftist union is called Maha Gujarat Mill Mazdoor Union. The Lal Vavta Union, with its policy of supporting the 'Progressive' measures of the Congress government has accepted a less militant attitude. Some of its leaders have also joined Indicate Union. The leftist union still nurtures the charisma of Indulal Yagnik and is more militant. Its membership is not very large but is confined to some few mills and to certain sections of labour force, especially the non-Gujarati mill-workers. It is difficult to get the past records of the undivided union because as the Secretary of the leftist union said it had to shift its office often in order to escape the wrath of the police. Sometimes the records and literature were seized by the police and destroyed. Partly because of the paucity of full-time office-staff, the union was not able to maintain systematic record also. At present, both the unions have small office each with some
It speaks to the credit of the union leaders that in spite of such inconveniences, they have been able to attract workers to their union. As one of the secretaries of the Mill Mazdoor Mandal told me, they do not care much about stable membership, because theirs is a movement.

Royist Union

The Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Mandal which was established in 1953 is an independent union and believes that trade unions should not follow any political line, though individual members should be politically active. Mr. Chandrakant Daru, well-known advocate of Ahmedabad was the moving spirit behind the Union till recently.

Mr. M.N. Roy, a revolutionary from Bengal, organized revolutionary movement in India between the years 1914 and 1930, (Crouch; 1966:62). In 1930, he became a dissident Communist, and through the Labour Committee of Indian National Congress entered trade union movement in India. Later on "he became more clearly anti-Communist, favoured peasant ownership of land and emphasized questions relating to individual liberty and the decentralization of power. Rather than class struggle, he talked in terms of a 'cultural renaissance' in which the people would be educated in scientific and libertarian values" (Sibnarayan Ray, quoted by Crouch; 1966:207).

The Radical Humanist Movement which Roy started emphasized the problem of cultural renaissance and the Mill Mazdoor Mandal follows the liberal philosophy of Roy.
The Union has not many members among the textile workers at present but during the 1956 Maha Gujarat movement and 1964 struggle for bonus and Dearness Allowance, the Union was able to attract a large number of mill-workers. During its hey days, the Union used to bring out a news weekly called 'Chetan.' Mr. Chandrakant Daru was able to win workers' cases where other unions had either failed or were not ready to accept them. In some cases, the Union had gone to Supreme Court and won the cases in favour of workers.

The Sarni Kamdar Association

The Sarni Kamdar Union is a craft union in that it consists of workers of Sarni (drawing-in) department. The department is predominantly manned by Muslim workers. In 1938, the Union was established by some of the prominent community leaders of Muslim. At that time, workers in this department were recruited through contract system. The workers were not paid adequate wages and compared to workers in other departments, they had many disadvantages due to the contract system. Therefore, the workers were organized by their community leaders and a strike call was given. Since the department is a key department in textile mills, the owners agreed to abolish the contract system and the strike was averted. Thereafter, the Union continued and after so many years, it still represents a large majority of workers from the department.

The Union has a good office and it can boast of some constructive activities for its members. For example, it provides school books to the students, interest-free loans, and sewing machines on instalment. It has built one co-operative housing society for its members.
The Union does not belong to any political party.
As non-Muslims are recruited in the department now, the purely Muslim character of the Union has to change in course of time.
At present, there are very few non-Muslims in the department.
The TLA also has a departmental union but the majority of the workers are with Sarni Association. The secretary admitted that it is due to the cooperative attitude of the TLA that this Union has survived. Because of the separate existence of this Union, its members usually do not get the benefits which members of other departments get. Many workers of the department solve the problem by subscribing to TLA also.

The Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Sangh

The Bharatiya Mill Mazdoor Sangh to which the Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Sangh is affiliated is an all-India organization. Its founder, Mr. D.B. Thengdi who is a member of the Ratriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) organized it in 1955. The basic philosophy of militant nationalism with narrow sectarian outlook and anti-communist bias governs trade unions of this federation.

The Ahmedabad Mill Mazdoor Sangh was established by a time-keeper of Calico mill in 1962. The Union continued upto 1967. It discontinued when the worker who started it renounced the world and became a Sanyasi. The present secretary who was working in the mill was asked to take up the work. (In his word, it was 'adesh' or order from the organization). He is now

* The information about the Union was provided by the present Secretary of the Union.
full-time Secretary of the Union. There are hardly 100 workers who are members of the Union. But the Union is able to attract more workers from various small factories.

The brief description of the seven registered unions, covered in the present study signifies one thing that as against the giant-sized TLA, there are pigmy-sized other Unions, three political and two communal and one independent. The mere fact that they all survive suggests that they all perform some functions for the workers.

It has been often said that the plurality of Unions saps the spirit out of the work force. It is true in the sense that it increases inter-union rivalry and prevents workers from providing a united struggle against the injustice done to them. But the multiplicity of Unions is not always dysfunctional. As Kamik (1966:276) says, "It will be wrong to assume that increase in the number of central organizations necessarily leads to the weakening or the disintegration of the trade union movement. Sometimes it secures for the movement new workers, sometimes it leads to organization of new Unions and the revitalization of the old ones. In view of this howsoever undesirable the development, one need not roundly condemn it as harmful."

With the above background we shall introduce our problem of research and the relevant literature on the subject in the next chapter.