Chapter - IV

EMERGENCE OF TRADE UNION

In the Madras State, the handloom industry came under the control of the Department of Handloom and Textiles. Under this department, the cooperative sector received its due importance. The private sector was left without any control and the master weavers were free to exploit the labourers under their control. Working class movement failed to safeguard the interest of the labourers. Actually the labourers gradually lost their genuine rights in course of time. Upto 1970 there was no evidence available to show that there existed any noteworthy working class movement in handloom industry in Kanyakumari District. During this long period, political parties organized their trade unions now and then in handloom trade unions worked for political gains but without trade union activities.

The other category was the industrial unit. They had no looms and they were the paid servants of the industry. There were two sectors of industrial unit of weaving industry. The cooperative sector was the Industrial Weavers Cooperative Societies and the loom-less weavers were accommodated in the industry. Government financed the Society by means of loans. In course of time, those loom-less labourers were
converted as share holders. The Thrift deposits scheme of the Weavers Cooperative production and sales society facilitated the labourers to become shareholders.¹

In the private sector, the industrial weaving unit recruited a large number of labourers. The master weaver who purchased the needed raw materials established the other infrastructures and paid the labourers. The master weaver organized the industry according to his own ability and capital. Thus the full time labourers in handloom industry were of two categories, viz. private sector and cooperative sector.

The working class in handloom industry covered the weavers and those labourers indulged in pre-weaving and post-weaving operations. The handloom weaving factory functioned in a large shed. Number of looms were erected in a narrow gap. Hence there was no space for free movement of the labourers. In a nearby shed, women and children were engaged in subsidiary weaving process such as winding of yarn for warps and webs, dubba winding, and pirn winding. Men workers were engaged in warping, sizing of warp ends through healds and reeds (drawing in) beaming and tie up (connect the healds

¹ Bye Laws of the Weavers Cooperative Production and Sale Society Limited, Section 16-A.
with the treadles). Nearly fifty percent of the labour force in a handloom factory was engaged in these related works.² The design masters, the supervisors, accountant, cashier, clerical staff and office assistants were the personnel of the weaving industry who were receiving monthly remuneration.³ Among these workers the design masters designed the weaving materials. The supervisors supervised the process of weaving. The rest were engaged in office works. Even though these personnel were monthly paid, the working class indulged in technical works such as weaving, bleaching, dyeing, warping and other connected works were paid on the basis of the quantum they produced and the variety they carried at. Weaving wages usually varied according to the counts of yarn used and the variety of cloth produced.⁴

**Low wage**

The labourers were paid poor wage. They were not entitled to receive any wage for public holidays or week-end holiday. They received no extra monetary benefits from the entrepreneurs. Overtime work was not allocated properly. Since majority of the labourers were

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² Personal interview, Krishnan Nair, N., Krishnancoil, 2 February 2011.
³ Personal interview, Velayutham, K., Ozhuginassery, 3 November 2012
coming from poor economic background, they had to struggle hard to carry on their life. The working class in handloom industry in order to carry on their domestic day-to-day affairs utilized their women folk and children to work in the handloom weaving factory. The women and children working in the winding section of the factory added their family income.

In the past two decades, the Government of Tamil Nadu had made many attempts to fix a minimum wage for the working class in handloom industry. In 1974 and in 1975 the Government of Tamil Nadu issued orders in exercise of the powers conferred by Clause (b) of sub-division (1) of Section 3 and sub-section (2) of Section 5 of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 (Central Act XI of 1948) fixing a minimum wage for the production of ordinary and special varieties. In 1983 a revised minimum wage structure was ordered after considering the advice of the committee appointed with regard to revision of minimum rates of wages for employment in handloom weaving industry. By this order, a proper classification of varieties was made and a minimum wage rate was fixed. In 1988 a draft notification revising minimum rates of wages was published for

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receiving suggestions from the public for consideration. A fifty percent wage rise was suggested.\(^7\) The same wage rise was carried over into effect by the Government in 1989.\(^8\) These legislations and amendments were made to help the poor labourers. But the intention of the Government was not made public. Even though these measures seemed to be good when it was implemented the real problem came to the fore-front. All these attempts and legislations of the Government were turned to be paper tiger only. To these legislations and amendments the entrepreneurs reacted sharply. They employed all the political and legal means to stay the Government Orders issued to regulate the wages of the handloom weaving labourers.\(^9\) The Government of Tamil Nadu did not make a serious attempt to vacate those stay orders and so the fruits of such Government attempts did not reach the working class.

In the cooperative sector also the lot of the labourers was not promising. The Bi-monthly Conference under the Chairmanship of the Assistant Director of Handlooms was attended by the Presidents and Secretaries of all Weavers’ Cooperative Societies. It decided the wage

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\(^9\) G.O.Ms. No. 1249, dated 26\(^{th}\) June 1989 was stayed by the Madras High Court on 30.8.1989.
structure of the working class in handloom industry under the cooperative sector. Assessing the wage structure from 1978 to 1993, ninety five percent (95%) of wage rise was carried out during these seventeen years. But the rates of raw materials such as yarn and chemicals had risen five times, i.e., five hundred percent. The non-technical personnel who were working in the weaving industry under the cooperative sector were allowed to receive higher wages of five hundred percent on the basis of the price rise. But the Co-optex was not willing to allow a reasonable wage rise for the technical workers in the industry.  

A meagre ninety five percent wage rise was allowed to technical workers of handloom industry during the past seventeen years. It is clearly understood that the private sector labourers were less paid than that of the cooperative sector.

**Discontinuity of Employment**

Discontinuity of employment was another cause for the low earning of the working class in handloom industry. The discontinuity

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10 Handbill, Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Kootturavu Uruppinargal Sangam, Palliyadi, 5.7.1995.

11 The wage rate per 34 inches of cloth of a particular variety in cooperative sector is Re. 1/- while in the private sector it is only sixty paise. Johana Thamayanthi, S., Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation “An Economic Study of the Women Weavers at Handloom Industry in Nagercoil Circle I”, Madurai Kamaraj University, 1990, p. 84.
arose due to shortage of yarn and working capital.\textsuperscript{12} In the cooperative sector production stood still due to shortage of circulating capital which paved the way for shortage of yarn for weavers.\textsuperscript{13} The magnitude of discontinuity of employment among the working class was greater in cooperative sector than in private sector.\textsuperscript{14} This was due to the fact that in private sector, the yarn supply is relatively better than that of the cooperative sector.\textsuperscript{15} Thus the poor workers and their families suffered for want of regular employment.

**Non-availability of extra monetary benefits**

The labourers who were working in the handloom industries depended only on the poor wage which they received from the proprietors. There was no provision for bata. No medical allowance or no provision for medical treatment or no E.S.I. facilities existed for the benefit of the working class. The labourer who fell ill during the working hours in the factory was sent to the hospital for medical aid. It

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 83.

\textsuperscript{13} The industrial weavers cooperative societies borrowed a large amount of money from the government. They had to pay the interest for the loans. So a large chunk of its profits are diverted towards payment of interests of the loans and repayment of loans. This led to severe cut in circulating capital which thereby paved the way for discontinuity of employment to the labourers.

\textsuperscript{14} Johana Thamayanthi, S., *op.cit.*, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{15} The master weavers did not tolerate their factory to the dormant. They diverted their capital which they earned all along by this trade for the purchase of yarn at higher prices from the private mills.
was the only responsibility undertaken by the proprietors.\textsuperscript{16} There was nothing for the education of the children of weavers. In certain circumstances, the proprietors of weaving industry provided festival advances according to their own discretion. Such advances were recovered from the wages of the labourers within a short time.

The Government orders on minimum wage to the labourers of handloom industry prescribed a percentage of dearness allowances to the workers.\textsuperscript{17} But no such dearness allowance was paid to the labourers. The Government passed an act by due process “The Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1981. This Act provided a clause to pay wages for holidays”.\textsuperscript{18} Due to the stiff resistances from the proprietors the benefits of the Acts did not reach the labourers. Only through much struggle the working class in handloom industry received a nominal bonus. It was the only extra monetary benefit given to the working class by the entrepreneurs of the industry.

\textsuperscript{16} Personal interview, Krishnan Nair, N., Krishnancoil, 2 February 2012.

\textsuperscript{17} The labourers were entitled to get Dearness Allowances. An increase of two paise per day for any rise of every point over and above six hundred and fifteen points. G.O.Ms. No. 1249 L.E., dated 26\textsuperscript{th} June 1989, Explanation I, Sec. (i) and (ii).

\textsuperscript{18} G.O.Ms.No. 723 L.E., dated 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1982, Chapter V, Clause 27.
In the cooperative sector, the weavers’ interests were better than that of the private sector. In the Primary Weavers Cooperative Society, the weaver was entitled to get seventy five percent of wages as ready money advance for the purchase of yarn, chemicals and the other needed materials for weaving.\(^{19}\) Again the weavers as the shareholders of the society were entitled to receive the dividend not exceeding six point two five (6.25\%) percent per annum on the paid up value of each share capital. In addition to that if the general body so decided, twenty five percent of the net profit may be divided among the members according to the wages earned by them.\(^{20}\) Further, the Contributory Thrift Fund Scheme for the Weavers Cooperative Society was useful for the economic development of the weavers.\(^{21}\) These facilities covered only the cooperative sector. Anyhow, these schemes, though attractive did not considerably encourage the economic prosperity of the working class in handloom industry.

The handloom weavers’ productivity was very low and there was no substantial improvement in the annual production. The weavers occasionally sought their livelihood in the seasonal

\(^{19}\) Bye Laws of the Weavers Cooperative Production and Sale Society Limited, Sec. 47 and 48.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., Section 50, Sub-section 5 and 7.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., Section 16-A.
agricultural operations which promised an immediate economic relief to some extent. The low productivity and earning of the weavers was due to various factors. The continuance of traditional techniques, power loom products infiltrated into the handloom market were some of the factors which paved the way for poor wage structure in handloom industry.\textsuperscript{22}

The weavers with their low wages found it difficult to make both ends meet. In order to carry on their life, they engaged their family also in the industry. Moreover, the labourers worked beyond 6.00 p.m. to earn their daily bread. During times of greater demands, they borrowed money from the money lenders at an exorbitant rate of interest. Sometimes the interest rate was raised to eighty percent per annum. If he borrowed Rs. 100/-, the money lender took away Rs. 10/- and paid Rs. 90/- only. Then he collected Rs. 2/- per day for fifty days. So the labourers due to indebtedness to the oppressive money lenders lose his daily income and live in poverty.\textsuperscript{23} Because of poverty, they live in small houses or huts which are mostly rented.\textsuperscript{24} The environments of their habitat were in poor hygienic conditions.

\textsuperscript{23} Personal interview, Velayutham, K., Ozhiginassery, 3 November 2012.
\textsuperscript{24} Personal interview, Krishnan Nair, N., Krishnancoil, 2 February 2012.
Majority of the working class were illiterates. Those belonging to the lower middle class of society carried over this trade as a subsidiary occupation. The labourers worked in the factory more than ten hours in a day. Diseases like tuberculosis, asthma and other diseases affected the labourers because of the unhealthy working condition. There was no provision for any recreational facilities or refreshment in the precincts of the factory.²⁵

Due to low wage, nutritious food was a dream to them. In spite of government’s repeated attempts, the proprietors successfully kept the labourers away from the social beneficiary schemes such as Employees Provident Fund, Employees State Insurance, etc. The labourers were forced to save from their meagre income to meet the social obligations such as their marriage or the marriage of their dependents. The workers experienced difficulties in obtaining meals or foodstuffs during their stay in the factory. No canteen facilities were there. The workers were not having any leisure time and so no recreational facilities needed. There was no Consumer Cooperative Society to safeguard the labourers from the profiteering and

²⁵ Personal interview, Krishnan Nair, N., Krishnancoil, 2 February 2012.
blackmarketing vendors who sell things of daily requirements.\textsuperscript{26} Their sanitary conditions were also very poor and they were working in overcrowded insanitary sheds which were no better than dark dungeons. Toilet conveniences existed without proper facilities.\textsuperscript{27} There were some instances that the labourers had to fight for proper urinal and latrine facilities.\textsuperscript{28}

The working class was not able to demand their basic rights. It was because they could not organize themselves as unions. They had no bargaining power due to the absence of unions and hence, the working class suffered for a long time and they were waiting to organize themselves into a union and fight for their rights. However, they could understand that no remedy will come without fighting.

**Emergence of Trade Union in Handloom Industry**

The 1952 struggle was conducted when Kanyakumari District was under Travancore-Cochin set up. But after the merger of the four southern taluks, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram with Tamil Nadu the whole way of the working class was completely changed. Due to the merger movement, the four

\textsuperscript{26} Johana Thamayanthi, S., *op.cit.*, pp. 90-100.

\textsuperscript{27} *Ibid*.

\textsuperscript{28} Petition of the labourers of Sreenivasa Textiles, Vadassery, to the Collector of Kanyakumari District, 18.2.1987.
southernmost taluks of Travancore – Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Agastheeswaram and Thovalai were merged with Tamil Nadu and the new District called Kanyakumari District was born.

**History of Trade Union Movement in India**

During the latter half of the 19th century a number of cotton and jute mills were established in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Calcutta due to the impact of the industrial revolution that took place in Europe. Even though the labourers of those factories frequently indulged for enhanced wages, the first organized trade union in Tamil Nadu came into existence. One of our great national leaders, V.O. Chidambarm Pillai was its architect. 29

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai met the workers of the Harvey Mill at Tuticorin because he understood that the workers were given more work and less pay. Their privileges were suppressed. 30 Chidambaram Pillai prepared the workers of Coral Cotton Mill to fight for their right and resist the exploitation. 31 But the Government prohibited public

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30 The Sasilakha Weekly Reports Confidential, 17th March 1908, p. 159.
meetings.\textsuperscript{32} To keep the strikers engaged, V.O.C. organized daily processions, singing of songs, visiting the houses of the unfortunate workers who had to face misfortune.\textsuperscript{33} In later stage the strike was called off. Thus Chidambaram Pillai was responsible to form the first labour union and strike.

In 1905, he started a trade union for the benefit of the labourers in Harvey Mills at Tuticorin. He planned for a strike and the labourers enthusiastically participated. The strike prolonged for 15 days and the labourers succeeded. They received an enhanced wage due to this strike.\textsuperscript{34} When Chidambaram Pillai was arrested by the British Government on the charge of sedition, the labourers of Harvey Mills started an agitation and it continued for three days. This was the first time the labourers entered into strike for political cause. But due to the detention of Chidambaram Pillai in Coimbatore jail, the Labour Movement lost its momentum.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Indra Devi, Terrorist Movement in South India, Trivandrum, 1977, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{33} V.O. Chidambaram Centenary Souvenir, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{34} Ramamurthy, P., Tamil Nadu Thozhilsanga Iyakkam: En Ninaivukal, Madras, 1990, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}
Trade Union in other areas

N.M. Joshi organized trade union in Bombay. In Madras around 1919 a trade union was organized among the labourers of Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. Thiru V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, V. Sarkarai Chettiar, Krishna Rao and B.P. Wadia were the architects of this labour union. A strike was organized demanding an enhanced wage. The strike prolonged for 7 months. The British Government indulged in suppressive attempts. The police opened fire on the striking labourers at Puliyanthoppu and in many other places and finally the agitation was suppressed.

When the strike was going on in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, the proprietors filed a litigation in the Madras Provincial High Court against the trade union leaders. They demanded Rs. 7/- lakhs as compensation for the loss in the Company’s turnover due to the strike. The court upheld the demand of the proprietors. This judgement was a

36 N.M. Joshi was one of the full-time members of Servants of India Society which was organized by one of our great national leaders Gopalakrishna Gokhale. He was appointed as a member in the Central Legislature representing the labourers.

37 Thiru V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar was a great Tamil scholar. He wrote many Tamil books and was noted for his revolutionary thinking and activities. V. Sarkarai Chettiar was a Christian Evangelist. He worked in Weslian Mission from which he got a meagre sum as salary through which amount he lived. Krishna Rao and B.P. Wadia were members of the Theosophical Society of India.

38 Ramamurthy, P., op.cit., p. 9.
thunderblow to the working class movement. By this judgement the labourers lost their trade union rights.\textsuperscript{39}

During this period, there were widespread trade union activities in other parts of India also. The trade union leaders began to think of proper coordination between the trade unions. They attended a conclave of various trade union leaders at Bombay and formed the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). Its first President was Lala Lajpat Rai. Its General Secretary was N.M. Joshi.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{Trade Union Activities after First World War}

When the First World War (1914-1918) came to an end in 1918 the victorious leaders of Europe, in order to avoid future war, formed the League of Nations, thanks to the endeavours of Woodrow Wilson, the then President of the U.S.A. Labour problems were one of the vital topics discussed in the meeting and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was established with its headquarters at Geneva.\textsuperscript{41} Representatives were sent to ILO deliberations. India sent AITUC leader N.M. Joshi to attend the meeting. He utilized this opportunity to highlight the Indian labour problems and referred the Madras

\textsuperscript{39} Ramamurthy, P., op.cit., pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 10.
Presidenty High Court’s judgement. Due to his efforts and the endeavour of ILO the Indian Trade Union Act, 1926 was passed by the Central Legislature. Thus the labourers got the right to organize trade unions.42

Following this, a number of trade unions came into existence throughout the country. MSM Thozhilalar Sangam, Tramway Labour Union, Electricity Labour Union, Printing Labour Union, Aluminium Labour Union, Barbers Labour Union, Scavengers Labour Union, South Indian Railway Union and many others were some of the labour unions which emerged in Madras.

In Ahmedabad, a Cotton Mill Labour Union was organized by Gandhiji. The Mastoor Mahajan was put under the leadership of Gulzarilal Nanda. In 1945, an attempt was made to unite the Mastoor Mahajan with the AITUC. But it failed.43 In 1946, AITUC was split into two. Sardar Vallabhai Patel formed the Indian Trade Union Congress under the leadership of Hariharanath Sastri, a trade union leader of Kanpur.44 It was the first split in the Working Class Movement and subsequently the Socialists formed the HMS.

After independence, the Congress Party formed the Government. Fearing disturbances, the leaders of the Communist Movement were kept under preventive detention, the AITUC and its related trade unions were banned. During this time the Indian Constitution was implemented in 1951, the Supreme Court of India passed a remarkable judgement and upheld the AITUC claim on the basis of Section 19 of Fundamental Rights codified in the Constitution of India. V. Sarkarai Chettiar, the then President of AITUC received back all the properties and the officers of the AITUC. The leaders took part in the 1952 elections and many came successful.45

Emergence of Handloom Industry in Kanyakumari District

Throughout India, including Tamil Nadu, many trade unions were organized. But those trade unions were only a beacon light to the handloom workers of South Travancore. When the people got prepared the Merger Movement of the four southern taluks emerged.

The Merger Movement

After the four southern taluks were merged with Tamil Nadu the handloom weavers had to face new situation. When they were with Travancore set up they launched a struggle in 1952 successfully. But

45 Ramamurthy, P., op. cit., p. 60.
now they do not know the ways and means to manage their own problems. The Saliar community fully involved in weaving opposed the trade unions.

Further, the Cooperative Movement’s impact on the handloom industry resulted in the formation of Weavers Cooperative Societies. So the aggrieved labour force in handloom industry enjoyed solace in the new management. The various attempts of the Trade Union Movement also did not evoke any response from the labourers.

The industry under the master weavers also began to flourish. It was due to the availability of cheap labourers. The drought in the early years of 1960s, the Chinese and Pakistani aggressions on India badly affected the Indian economy. There existed widespread famine and unemployment. The agricultural labourers were forced to choose alternative livelihood. A large number of labourers from Kalkulam taluk, Nadar and Krishnavagai by caste infiltrated into the weaving industry. The master weavers making use of the ignorance of this new labourers reaped rich harvest. The new labourers were not aware of the 1952 struggle. So, most of the benefits enjoyed by the labour force in the wake of 1952 struggle disappeared. Women folk also joined the handloom labour force as weavers.
The huge profits induced the entrepreneurs to start new factories. In 1960s there came into existence a large number of new handloom factories.\textsuperscript{46} No trade union existed among the labour force except the old factory committee, the only relics of the Thovalai Agasteeswaram Taluk Factory Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam. The Communist Party of India developed rapport with the Factory Committee. It now and then exposed the problems of the labourers in their factory concerned and solved the problem with the proprietors.\textsuperscript{47} At the same time the Factory Committee was incapable of carrying any trade union activities worth to note.

**Emergence of D.M.K. Trade Union**

The political process in the early 1960s underwent a change throughout the Madras State. In the 1962 general election, the Indian National Congress was able to command a solid majority and formed the Governments both in the centre and the State. But the Dravida Munnetta Kazhakam (D.M.K.)\textsuperscript{48} party under the leadership of C.N. Annadurai improved its performance considerably. This growing

\textsuperscript{46} Personal interview, Krishnan Nair, N., Krishnancoil, 2 February 2012.

\textsuperscript{47} Personal interview, Arunachalam, N., Vadassery.

\textsuperscript{48} The DMK Party was founded by C.N. Annadurai K. Karunanithi because of their difference of opinion with E.V.R. the D.K. leader over his controversial marriage with Maniammai.
The popularity of the D.M.K. Party paved the way for further mobilization of political activities. The D.M.K. normally adopted positive approach towards the weavers. Again this was the time in which they had formulated various labour unions in different trades as a device to gain political support. The party leaders understood that handloom industry was a fertile ground for their purpose.

The pioneer of D.M.K. Trade Union Movement was C. Ramaswamy of Vadassery. When he was a weaver at Madurai, he came into contact with Madurai Muthu, a leading D.M.K. functionary. Due to the influence of Madurai Muthu, he mobilized support to organise a trade union among the weavers with D.M.K. Party affiliation. In such a situation, he returned to Nagercoil and joined the Marimuthu Company at Ozhuginassery. He initiated to organize a D.M.K. sponsored trade union at Nagercoil. In 1964 his endeavour was fruitful and a trade union was organized. It was named as ‘Kumari

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49 In 1952, C. Ramaswamy was a weaver in Ganapathy Weaving Factory at Vadassery. He was one of the well wishers of the Thovalai Agasteeswaram Taluk Factory Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam. He participated in the 1952 struggle under the leadership of C. Sankar. Due to the lock out he left Vadassery and joined in Karimani Plantation estate to work as a cooli along with the other workers. In course of time he went to Madurai Sellur and worked in the Madurai Industrial Weaving Factory. There he introduced the technique of weaving turkey variety in handlooms. In Madurai T. Marimuthu Weaving Company offered a chance to him in order to introduce turkey weaving at Madurai. He joined the Marimuthu Company.
Mavatta Dravida Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam’. Its President was V. Krishnan from Vadassery. C. Ramaswamy was its Secretary.\(^{50}\)

The Kumari Mavatta Dravida Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam followed peaceful method to achieve its ends. It directly approached the proprietors and presented the grievances and demands of the workers for their perusal. It wholeheartedly accepted the willing offers of the proprietors. Its objectives were wage rise and bonus for weavers. It was affiliated with the DML sponsored Handloom Trade Union wing which was under the leadership of A. Masthan, Pettai, Tirunelveli.\(^{51}\) The positive approach of the D.M.K. Trade Union was due to the political affiliation of the master with D.M.K. Many of the master weavers were supporters of the D.M.K. Party.\(^{52}\)

The trade union became popular among the workers for there was no other political party affiliated union. The union had clear aims and objectives. The major aims of the union were:

1. To unite all the workers working in the weaving industries.
2. To educate the workers about the just causes.
3. To educate the workers, the just benefits due to them.

\(^{50}\) Personal interview, Ramaswamy, C., Vadassery, 11 December 2011.

\(^{51}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{52}\) By-Laws, Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam, Nagercoil, 1979.
4. To cooperate with the managements to avoid strikes and lockouts.

5. To adopt peaceful means to obtain their benefits. If fails to resort to strike work.\(^5^3\)

**Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam**

Between 1970 and 1975 there was widespread frustration and distrust among the labourers of handloom industry. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) utilized the unorganized Factory Committee and began to mobilize its activities. Many agitations were carried out and trade union activities sprang to a maximum. Since the CITU commanded a majority handloom weaving labourers, the D.M.K. affiliated trade union planned to organize a United Trade Union activity without party affiliation. A new trade union came into existence under the leadership of an advocate Thiagarajan, a D.M.K. sympathizer. The Kumari Mavatta Dravida Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam merged with the new trade union called Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam.\(^5^4\) When D.M.K. met a vertical split among the leaders, advocate Thiagarajan joined the group headed by M.G.

\(^{53}\) By-Laws, Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam, Nagercoil, 1979, 5-7.

\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*
Ramachandran. So the Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam became defunct.  

**Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam**

In 1978 the D.M.K. in order to consolidate its labour force, once again started a trade union for the handloom labourers called ‘Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam’. The union, from the beginning declared that their way of approach would be peaceful negotiation instead of agitation.

**The CITU Handloom Labour Union**

When the Working Class Movement lost its momentum after the 1952 struggle, the undivided Communist Party of India took the cause of the labourers by supporting the unorganized factory committee in their endeavours. In 1964 the party was subject to a vertical split. Majority of the comrades of Kanyakumari District chose the left wing called Communist Party of India (Marxist). Its trade union wing, Centre of Indian Trade Unions organized a trade union for handloom

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56 The President of DMK trade union Thoppoor M. Subramaniam, an advocate and politician. Its Vice-President was Thanappan, a handloom weaver from Keezha Putheri. Its Secretary was P. Kuttappan, a weaver from Krishnankoil. Its Assistant Secretary was M.Y.A. Wahab, a politician, Thengapattinam.

57 Handbill, Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam, n.d.
weavers, viz. ‘Aikkiya Kaithari Nesaru Thozhilalar Sangam’. It was registered as per the provisions of the Trade Union Act, 1926, Sec. 28 (No. 49/KKM).

The objective of the trade union were as follows:

1. Streamlining the relation between the members and their employers.
2. To render help to the members as per the provisions of Law.
3. To secure reasonable life and working conditions.
4. To endeavour to redress their grievances.
5. To provide relief to members against the conditions of sickness, old age, unemployment, death and accident.
6. Attempt to settle dispute between the members and their employers.
7. To promote the civic and political interest of members.
8. To cooperate and coordinate with the organizations of workers having similar objectives.\(^\text{58}\)

**Other Trade Unions in Handloom Industry**

Weavers who were interested in the Indian National Congress affiliated with the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)
started ‘Kanya Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam’. Soman, a weaver by profession acted as its General Secretary.

When the D.M.K. reorganized its trade union in 1978, the supporters of AIADMK organized themselves and formed their own handloom industry-based trade union. The then Honourable Minister for Handlooms, Mudakurichi Subbulekshmi inaugurated the trade union ‘Kumari Mavatta Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam’ at Nagercoil. It was registered (No. 133/KKM) and it had its affiliation with the AIADMK trade union wing ‘Anna Thozhil Sanga Peravai’.

Kumari Ananthan, a member of Parliament from Nagercoil constituency left the Janatha Party and formed a new political party, viz. Gandhi Kamaraj National Congress. The supporters of this party organized a trade union for handloom labourers and named it as Kamaraj Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam. Very soon, as Kumari Ananthan joined the Congress Party, the Kamaraj Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam became defunct.

M. Thavasimuthu, once a weaver and an office-bearer of CITU handloom trade wing, organized an independent trade union in 1986. In course of time, it had its affiliation with the AITUC. It was
registered (No. 250/KKM) and was functioning under the guidance of V. Parameswaran Nair, a leader of the Communist Party of India.

The General Workers Union was organized for the benefit of the clerical staff and office assistants. It aimed to protect the genuine rights of them. It was affiliated with the CITU.

In the handloom industry, a large number of labourers are engaged in the processing of warps. For their benefits and to protect their genuine rights, a separate trade union called the ‘Nagara Pavu Unarthum Thozhilalar Sangam’ was organized in 1974. It aimed at the enhancement of wage and a higher bonus for the workers who were engaged in the process of warp. It was affiliated with the CITU. The Sangam was not so strong as other unions.

To withstand the pressures of the working class movements, the proprietors of handloom industry organized their own trade union. It was named as ‘Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Javuli Urpathisazhargal Sangam’. K.U. Nathan from Ozhuginassery acted as its Manager and carried over the business of the Sangam. It aimed to safeguard the interest of the proprietors of handloom industry.
The political affiliation of the labour force in handloom industry was with the D.M.K. or the Congress in the 1960-197.\textsuperscript{59} But in the trade union activities majority of the labourers around Nagercoil supported the CITU affiliated Aikkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam. Nearly eighty percent of the labourers were willing to carry over the decision of the activities of CITU sponsored programmes.\textsuperscript{60}

All these trade unions were emerged and functioned in and around Nagercoil town. Beyond Nagercoil, even trade unions affiliated to political parties were not able to break any ice to organize working class movements.

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\textsuperscript{59} Personal interview, Krishnan Nair, N., Krishnancoil, 2 February 2011.

\textsuperscript{60} Personal interview, Velayudham, K., Ozhuginassery., 2 February 2011.