Chapter - VI

WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT BETWEEN 1980-1990

The working class movement in the seventies met ups and downs. But during 1980 it entered into a life and death struggle. During this period, a master programme was chalked out by various trade unions to give life to the industry but that ended in failure.

1980 Wage Rise and Bonus Struggles

During June 1980, the Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam and the Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam served demand notices to the proprietors of handloom weaving factories. (1) They demanded to enhance the wage of workers 50 percent. (2) A higher bonus of 20 percent. (3) To improve the sanitary condition in the factories. When the proprietors rejected the demands, the trade unions resorted to agitation. The Kanya Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam and the Kamaraj National Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam also entered the fray. The agitation started without proper coordination among the trade unions.¹ The weavers in the nice variety producing units went on strike from 23.6.1980. Those

¹ Strike Notice, 23.6.1980.
in the turkey variety producing units followed suit on 26.6.1980.\textsuperscript{2} They sought the moral support of all other trade unions functioning in Kanyakumari District.\textsuperscript{3}

Even though the CITU and the D.M.K. unions announced the strike programme individually, after a week long agitation they joined in a common platform to wage a united struggle. They organized a Joint Action Council to chalk out programmes to carry on the agitation.

A huge procession of nearly 7,000 weavers was organized towards the Collector’s Office. They submitted a memorandum requesting Government’s intervention in the labour dispute. In the course of the procession, it was reported that damages were caused to the handloom factories and the police charge sheeted the labour leaders.\textsuperscript{4}

Due to the magnitude of the agitation, the government intervened. The Collector of Kanyakumari District issued an appeal to the agitating labourers to avoid the agitational approach. He conveyed the attempt of the government to resolve the crisis and made a public note about the proposed talk on 24.7.1980 by the parties concerned in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Handbill dated 25.6.1980.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Letter of the General Secretary, Aiykkia Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, 29.6.1980.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Memorandum submitted to the Collector, Kanyakumari District, 2012.
\end{itemize}
the presence of the Minister of Labour Welfare. \(^5\) Subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu sent the Deputy Commissioner of Labour Welfare to Nagercoil to settle the labour dispute. He held talks with the labour leaders but the talk failed. The Arcot Commissioner of Labour Welfare arbitrarily announced one percent wage rise to the workers of handloom industry. The agitating labourers rejected the offer. \(^6\) The Labour Welfare Officer, Nagercoil invited the concerned parties to participate in the conciliation talk. Even though repeated attempts were made by the Officer, no such talk took place because the proprietors refused to participate. \(^7\)

The strike prolonged for more than two months. The poor labourers due to economic strain, found it difficult to carry on their day-to-day life. When no other tangible solution was at sight the labourers initiated a talk. Many rounds of talks were held at Vattakottai, Kanyakumari and Nagercoil. \(^8\) The proprietors were unwilling to offer anything to the labourers. But the economic pressure

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\(^7\) Proceedings of the Labour Officer, Nagercoil, No. 1612/80, 27.8.80, 5.9.80 and 10.10.80.
\(^8\) On behalf of the labourers K. Velayudham (CITU), P. Krishnan and M.Y.A. Wahab (DMK), Soman (Congress) participated in the talk. M. Mony (Rajan Weaving Factory), P. Subbiah (Subash Textiles), N. Arunachalam (Ranies Textiles), were the representatives of the Urpathiyalargal Sangam. K.N. Nathan, the Manager of the Proprietors’ Union masterminded the deliberations.
on the working class was such that they could not prolong the strike. So the leaders accepted an oral settlement. The proprietors lifted the lock out to allow the labourers to resume their work.\textsuperscript{9} Thus the strike came to an end without achieving anything beneficial to the working class on 1.9.1980.

The D.M.K. trade union labourers resumed their work immediately. But the CITU labour union workers opposed the settlement and they stayed away for a few days. In course of time, they also resumed their work as they were left out by the D.M.K. leaders and also they were not able to withstand the economic pressure.

In the unwritten settlement, the proprietors assured the labourers that talks would be held with the leaders of trade unions to settle the demands of the wage rise and a higher bonus.\textsuperscript{10} But such talks never came to be materialized. From 1.9.1980 onwards, the trade unions tried their best to bring the proprietors to the table. But they avoided a talk with the labour leaders. So the Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, in order to persuade the proprietors to have the

\textsuperscript{9} General Circular to the Trade Unions by the Action Council, to the workers, 1.9.1980.

\textsuperscript{10} Letter of Anandan to the Secretary of Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam, 9.2.1981.
talk, initiated to organize one day token strike on 22.10.1980.\textsuperscript{11} But such attempt did not bear fruit. On 8 November 1980, the D.M.K. trade union withdrew from the Joint Action Council which was established to carry on the 1980 agitation.\textsuperscript{12} The Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam reminded the assurance of the proprietors regarding wage rise and requested them to implement the same without delay.\textsuperscript{13}

The 1980 agitation failed to achieve its ends. The labourers got nothing tangible and the proprietors humiliated and insulted the striking labourers by not extending any monetary benefits to the weavers. The majority of the male labourers out of humiliation and no hope of getting a reasonable wage left the industry while the fair sex enrolled in large numbers. The change of labourer pattern paved the way for a permanent setback on the working class movement in handloom industry.

The labourers felt that the proprietors cheated them by giving false assurances. They exerted pressure on the trade unions to discuss

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Letter of Velayutham, K., to the President of Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Nagercoil, 14.10.1980.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Letter of Wahab, M.Y.A., to Peshi, M.J. Nagercoil, 8.11.1980.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Letter of Wahab, M.Y.A. to the President, Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Vadassery, 21.12.1980.
\end{itemize}
the matter.\textsuperscript{14} The trade unions began to accelerate their activities. The Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam in its executive meeting decided that until the proprietors accept to raise the wages of the weavers, but the weavers refused to get the wages for their work but accept only the advance from the proprietors.\textsuperscript{15} Again the Secretaries of various trade unions summoned a general body meeting on 24.3.1981. The meeting was intended to remind the assurances of the proprietors and to finalise programmes to get an immediate enhanced wages for the weavers.\textsuperscript{16} In spite of all these efforts the proprietors turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of the workers.

In 1980, the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry region instructed the proprietors to implement the Employees Provident Fund scheme in handloom weaving industry. He sent a number of proceedings of his office addressed to the proprietors of handloom industries in Kanyakumari District. The proprietors stayed the proceedings on 16.4.1981 through the Madras

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14} Letter of Annamalai, T., to the Secretary of DMK Trade Union, 9.2.1981.
\textsuperscript{15} Letter of Wahab, M.Y.A. to the President of AIADMK Handloom Trade Union, Nagercoil, 25.2.1981.
\textsuperscript{16} Invitation of the General Body Meeting 24.3.1981.
\end{footnotesize}
High Court.\textsuperscript{17} Thus the labourers of handloom industries were deprived of enjoying the benefit of the Employees Provident Fund scheme.\textsuperscript{18} The Court’s decision to stay the attempt was another onslaught on the frustrated labour force. The Employees Provident Fund scheme to the handloom industry labourers has not yet been implemented.\textsuperscript{19}

During 1981, there was a gradual increase in the price of yarn upto 35 to 40 percent. It was due to shortage of electricity and sharp rise of the price of cotton. The Government’s interim arrangements to streamline the supply of yarn to the weavers proved to be a futile attempt. Due to this strain the proprietors decided to stop production.\textsuperscript{20} Throughout Tamil Nadu both the working class and the proprietors organized an agitation to insist the government to control the price rise of yarn. The CITU organisation invited all the trade unions for a joint agitation. It also aimed to plan the ways and means to get the full

\textsuperscript{17} In their affidavit, the proprietors claimed that the weavers of handlooms were not employees within the purview of the Employees Provident Fund Act, 1952. They claimed that the management had no control over the weaver and the labourer worked in the factory according to his own ability and wishes.

\textsuperscript{18} Stay Order of the Madras High Court to writ petition No. 2808 to 2820 of 1981, 16.4.1981.

\textsuperscript{19} Personal interview, Velayudham, K., Ozhuginassery, 12.11.2012.

\textsuperscript{20} Petition of the President, Urpathiyalargal Sangam to the President of India, dated 1.6.1981 and to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, 20.5.1981.
wages during the layoff days as the weavers of Madurai enjoyed. But the struggle did not materialize due to the failure of the political parties to involve themselves very deeply.

The year 1981 was a landmark in the history of the Working Class Movement in handloom industry throughout Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Government passed the Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1981 which was Manna from heaven to the Working Class Movement in Kanyakumari District. The trade unions tried their level best to get the act implemented. The proprietors opposed this act and they approached the Madras High Court to stay the implementation of the Act. Understanding the plan of the proprietors the trade unions accelerated their activities.


22 In the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu, Bill No. 41 of 1979 was passed by the members on September 10, 1981 and got the assent of the President of India on 30.9.1981. The Act contains provisions regarding health and welfare of the working class in handloom industry such as lighting and toilet facilities, etc. The Act prescribes the working hours, wages, overtime and intervals, weekly holidays, leave to the workers, etc. It states about the provisions of penalties on the producers for violation of the Act. This Act makes provisions relating to most of the matters dealt with in those social beneficiary acts such as Factories Act, Payment of Wage Act, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, etc.
The CITU sponsored Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam made an attempt to safeguard the said act from the onslaught of the proprietors through legal battles. It invited all the trade unions related to handloom industry for a meeting on 10.7.1982. The Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam alone responded the call. But it evaded the decision of the meeting on the pretext that it needed the option of the party high command to act.\(^{23}\)

A procession was held on 19.7.1982 and a petition was submitted to the District Collector demanding the withdrawal of the Government Order which exempted the Weavers’ Cooperative Society Industries from the purview of the Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1981, to publish the recommendations of Minimum Wages Committee, to set right the attempt of the proprietors of handloom factories against the Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers Act, 1981. It submitted a writ petition in the Madras High Court in the name of M. Thavasimuthu and tried to safeguard the said Act.\(^{24}\) It requested the labourers to donate funds for the expenditure of the case and collected litigation fund. The Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam circulated a handbill to explain

\(^{23}\) Handbill, Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Krishnancoil, dated 25.7.1982.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 25.7.1982.
the AIADMK Government’s positive approach towards the Act of 1981. It rejected any agitational approach for the implementation of the Act. It hoped that the Government would do everything possible to implement the Act of 1981.25

On the eve of the Onam festival, the Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam organized a meeting of various trade union leaders on 29.7.1982 in order to discuss the demands of the handloom labourers.26 It invited the party affiliated trade unions and labour leaders for a meeting on 24.8.1982 to organize a Joint Action Committee for formulating an action plan to get higher bonus for the year 1982.27 In the meeting a Joint Action Council was formed and in the meeting it was decided to serve demand notices. Accordingly they served demand notices to the proprietors of handloom factories with copies extended to the Assistant Commissioner of Labour (Conciliation) Nagercoil.

The Assistant Commissioner made an attempt to settle the labour dispute and sent notices to the proprietors of all factories.28

26 Letter of the Assistant Secretary of Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesaru Thozhilalar Sangam to the President of Anna Kaithari Thozhilalar Sangam, 23.7.1982.
proprietors refused to yield. Due to ineffective programme the Joint Action Committee was dissolved. The age old system of ‘Factory Committee’ came to the scene. It used its pressure tactics to redress the grievances of the labourers. The unified trade union activities were a forgotten dream to be remembered due to the political party involvement on trade union activities.

**Struggle for bonus in Sreenivasa Textiles**

Sreenivasa Textiles was one of the handloom weaving factories at Vadassery. More than 75 labourers were working in the factory. The labourers of Sreenivasa Textiles conducted a meeting on 20.8.1982 and selected a committee of six members under the leadership of V. Thanappan to have talks with the proprietor on behalf of the labourers regarding the bonus for the year 1982. The proprietor was very particular to deduct the advances so far received by the labourers from the bonus of 1982. The General Body meeting of the labourers on 29.8.1982 decided to receive the bonus without any deductions. They further decided to refuse to receive the bonus if there was any deduction or change. The factory owner declared lock out from 20.8.1982.
The Factory Committee sent a petition to the Assistant Commissioner of Labour (Conciliation), Nagercoil for a settlement. The proprietor followed foul means to disintegrate the solidarity of the labourers but failed. A conciliation talk was held in the presence of the Assistant Commissioner of Labour on 9.9.1982. It was accepted to declare and pay 9 percent of bonus and also to lift the lock out to facilitate the labourers to resume their work. The proprietors lifted the lock out on 13.9.1982 but refused to disburse the bonus of 9 percent in full.

In a bid to get their demands conceded the Factory Committee organized satyagraha and token fasting in front of the factory. It appealed the Assistant Commissioner of Labour to intervene. A conciliation talk was held by the initiative of the Assistant Commissioner of Labour and a settlement was arrived. The proprietor accepted to issue 9 percent of bonus for the year 1982, but disbursed the money by deducting the advances which were received by the labourers concerned. But the proprietor accepted to disburse an advance of Rs. 40/- to Rs. 75/- to the labourers on the basis of the total

29 Petition of V. Thanappan to the Assistant Commissioner of Labour (Conciliation), Nagercoil, 6.9.1982.
wages they received from January 1982 to August 1982. Both the parties accepted the settlement. Thus the struggle ended in favour of the weavers.

**Convention of 1982**

The Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam organized a convention on 15.12.1982 as a part of Statewide attempt to evoke the involvement of the labourers in the Working Class Movement in handloom industry. They insisted a number of demands such as enhanced wage, enforcement of the Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1981 and publication of the report related to the minimum wages for the labourers in handloom industry. It requested the brethren trade unions of handloom industry to participate in the convention. The convention took place on the said date but it failed to evoke sympathy from the weavers.

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33 Handbill, Aiykkia Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Nagercoil, 25.11.1982.
34 Letter of the Secretary, Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam to the President of Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, 5.12.1982.
**Working Class Movement in 1983**

The dawn of 1983 witnessed a congenial climate in the handloom industry with regard to the labour-proprietor relationship. During the end of 1982 the price of the yarn rose to an unprecedented height. This affected both the labourers and the proprietors. It affected the production prospects of the proprietors. Hence the proprietors of various mills declared lay off.\(^{35}\)

The labourers suffered due to the layoff declared by the proprietors. So both the parties planned to influence the government to control the rise in price and supply yarn regularly to the industries. The mill owners claimed that the price rise of yarn was due to the power cut and shortage of cotton in the market. But unexpectedly large quantity of new raw cotton came to the market and the price began to fall. The mill owners made use of this opportunity to exploit the labourers.\(^{36}\)

In order to safeguard the interest of the proprietors and the labourers in the handloom industry against the exploitation of the mill owners, a Joint Action Committee of proprietors and labourers was

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36 Handbill, Handloom Industry Trade Unions of Madurai, Madurai, n.d.
formed in Madurai on 2.1.1983. They demanded the Government to purchase yarn and supply it to the proprietors of handlooms through Government depots at 50 percent of its price. It also demanded that the Government should supply the basic essential commodities in concessional rates to the labourers in order to save the labourers from starvation.\footnote{Handbill, Handloom Industry Trade Unions of Madurai, Madurai, n.d.}

**The Joint Action Council**

In Kanyakumari District also an attempt was made to have a united agitation against the price rise of yarn on the basis of Madurai experiment. The Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Javuli Urpathiyalargal Sangam initiated the move. It sent letters to different trade unions related to handloom industry inviting them to participate in the meeting on 18.1.1983. They intended to chart out joint programmes and planned to insist the Central and State Governments to take necessary permanent steps for the availability of yarn at reasonable price.\footnote{Letter of the Manager of Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Javuli Urpathiyalargal Sangam to the leaders of various labour unions, Vadassery, 17.1.1983.}

As scheduled, the meeting was held and a Joint Action Council was rformed. It demanded a Tripartits Committee of mill owners of handloom and powerloom and a representative of the Government to
fix the rate of yarn once in three months. It also insisted to impose a 60 percent levy on the production of spinning mills in order to distribute yarn to the weavers as demanded by the Joint Action Committee of the proprietors and the weavers of Madurai. It demanded that the mill owners and the wholesale yarn merchants should make it public the quantity and price rate of yarn which they possessed.\footnote{Handbill, various trade unions related to Handloom Industry, Nagercoil, n.d.}

To insist the demands and to attract the attention of the Government a procession march was held on 24.1.1983 towards the Collector’s Office, Nagercoil.\footnote{Handbill circulated to general public, 20.1.1983.} A dharna was organized in front of the Collectorate in order to invite the intervention of the government to the crisis.\footnote{Handbill circulated by the workers union, 24.2.1983.}

A statewide agitation was organized on 24.2.1983 demanding to control the price of yarn and to protect the working class from the crisis. In Kanyakumari District the Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam took the initiative to organize a dharna. It sent letters to brethren trade union to attend a meeting on 20.2.1983 to plan
the future programme for the agitation. The trade unions formed a Joint Action Council and the agitation was carried out.

The Kumari Mavatta Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam circulated a handbill. It explained various attempts taken by the AIADMK government to regulate the price rise of yarn. It pledged its goodwill to the government and stated that the government should do all the necessary arrangements to redress the grievances of the labourers.

In spite of the Joint endeavours of the labourers and the proprietors in 1983, labour dispute arose during June and July 1983. On the eve of Onam festival, the labourers demanded higher bonus. The Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam and the Kumari Mavatta Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam sent notices to the proprietors. The Assistant Commissioner of Labour (Conciliation), Nagercoil intervened and tried his best to settle the problem. But due to the stubborn attitude of the proprietors, the labourers did not get any benefit.

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42 Letter of M. Thavasimuthu to the President of Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Nagercoil, n.d.
43 Handbill, Kumari Mavatta Anna Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, n.d.
44 Notice of the Assistant Commissioner of Labour (Conciliation), Nagercoil, No. 2347/82, 10.7.1983.
The Minimum Wages Act, 1983

Since 1982, the trade unions made persistent efforts to publish the recommendation of the committee headed by Balaraman, on minimum wages of the labourers in handloom industry.\(^\text{45}\) The Government considered the recommendations of the committee and passed necessary government orders.\(^\text{46}\) The Government of Tamil Nadu made provisions for dearness allowance to the labourers of handloom industry in the Government Order.\(^\text{47}\)

The proprietor’s Statewide Association ‘The Tamil Nadu Handloom Industry and Trade Association’ under the leadership of T.A. Kannappan opposed every move of the Government to raise the wage of the working class.\(^\text{48}\) Due to the constant opposition, the Government dropped the provisions of the said act regarding dearness allowance to the labourers in handloom industry.\(^\text{49}\)

\(^{45}\) Handbill, Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Krishnancoil, 25.11.1982.


\(^{47}\) The Tamil Nadu Government Gazette Part II, Sec. 2, 27.4.1983, p. 359.

\(^{48}\) Memorandum submitted by T.K. Kannappan to the Committee on wage structure.

From 1984 to 1986, the trade unions organized agitations individually and collectively to safeguard the interest of the working class. They cried to implement the Government Order revising the minimum wage in 1983 and the Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1981. But the labourers lost their bargaining power due to the changed environment in handloom industry. Large number of male labourers left the industry in order to seek better prospects and the women labourers were not interested in organizing a movement. The political affiliations of the trade unions and the role of the political parties in formulating the activities of the trade unions wrecked the basic features of trade unionism. So in spite of repeated attempts, the labourers were not able to muster their bargaining power and get their demands conceded. Thus the trade unions in handloom industry began to slumber.

The Variety Reservation Struggle

In 1986, the Government of India published a notification by which it reserved the production of 22 varieties of cloth only to handloom industry.\(^5\) The order reserved certain varieties with certain

\(^5\) DCH/ENF/1 (2)/86, 4.8.1986.
specifications. The powerloom sector opposed the Reservation Act and so the labour organizations and the proprietors of handlooms jointly opposed it. A state level meeting was held on 28.7.1986 and an action plan was designed. They resolved to organize a statewide one day strike on 21.8.1986 and handed over memorandum to the Collectors, requesting the Government to implement the Variety Reservation Act.

The Kanyakumari District unit of all trade unions and the Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Javuli Urpathiyalargal Sangam held a meeting on 13.8.1986. They decided to organize one day token strike on 21.8.1986 and a procession march to the Collectorate to attract the attention of the government to implement the Variety Reservation Act. They requested all the handloom industry related establishment to cooperate with them. The proposed strike was carried on and the trade unions insisted to implement the Variety Reservation Act, 1986.

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51 The twenty-two varieties reserved for handloom industry included Saree Kotah, Doria Saree, Tie and Dye Saree, Dholi, Gamcha and Angavastram, Lungi, Shirtings, Towels, Table cloth and Mat, Napkins, etc.

52 The meeting was attended by trade union leaders like Anangaputhur Ramalingam, M.L.C. (AIADMK), K. Vaithianathan (CITU), C. Kuppuswamy (DMK), Gopu (AITUC) and the General Secretaries of Tamil Nadu Handloom Industry and Trade Association, C. Kappannan and N.A. Ramamurthy.

53 Handbill, Trade Unions and Urpathiyalargal Sangam.
There was no bigger struggle in this regard as the labourers were not aware of the problems.

**The Minimum Wage Act, 1989**

The Government published a draft notification in the Government Gazette in order to receive any objection or suggestion about the proposed revision of the minimum wages to the handloom labourers. After considering the suggestion it confirmed the preliminary notification. There is provision for dearness allowance. The proprietors successfully stayed the Government Order on 39.8.1989. So the labourers were not able to enjoy the benefit. Since the labourer movements were inactive, the labourers were not able to insist their rights.

**Working Class Movement in 1990**

The Working Class Movement in handloom industry during 1990 lost its strength day by day. The handloom industry itself lost its glory due to stiff competition in the market from the mill cloth and the change of taste among the consumers. Many factories stopped

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their production and many proprietors left the trade permanently. In such a situation, there was no scope for trade union activities. The Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam met its end after the death of its leader P. Kittappan. The Kumari Mavatta Anna Kaithari nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam hardly indulged in any trade union activities. The Kanya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam and the Gandhi Kamaraj National Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam disappeared. The Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam continued its trade union activities for some more years. But it was not able to muster sufficient strength to carry on trade union activities.

M. Thavasimuthu’s AIYUC affiliated trade union Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam circulated a number of handbills to highlight the problem of the weavers. It insisted wage rise of the labourers in accordance with the general price rise, availability of yarn in control price for weavers, write off the private and cooperative loans of the weavers and implementation of the Variety Reservation Act of 1986. The Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam organized a dharna in front of the village office at Vadassery on 24.4.1990.\footnote{Minutes of the Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, 21.7.1990, p. 22.} It demanded the implementation of the Minimum
Wage Act, 1989, the Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Handloom) Act, 1981, election to the office bearers of Weavers Cooperative Societies, arrangements for the housing of handloom labourers and pension for the aged labourers.\textsuperscript{57}

All these attempts of the trade unions did not evoke any response from the parties concerned.

The general body meeting of the Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam met on 21.7.1990. It decided to organize an agitation for achieving the following demands.\textsuperscript{58} It demanded (1) 50 percent wage rise from 1.1.1990, (2) twenty percent bonus with 5 percent exgratia, (3) implementation of the provision of the Factory Act and Labour Acts, (4) week end holidays with full wages for all labourers, etc. It charted out a multi-stage agitational programme to attract the attention of the proprietors of handloom industry.\textsuperscript{59} Strike notices were served to the proprietors of all handloom factories in and around Nagercoil. Even though the proprietors were not willing to have

\textsuperscript{57} Handbill, Aiykkiya Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, Krishnancoil, 21.4.1990.

\textsuperscript{58} Handbill, 24.4.1990.

\textsuperscript{59} Circulation Notice No.3, Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Sangam, 25.7.1990.
a talk with the labour leaders, they came forward to give twelve percent wage rise and thus the proprietors avoided the strike.\textsuperscript{60}

On the eve of the Onam festival, during 1990, the labourers with full of frustration and disappointment on trade unions based on political parties, organized themselves independently. They demanded a higher bonus than the previous year. When the proprietors refused to accept the demand, the labourers resorted to agitation. The female labourers of Subash Textiles gheroed the proprietor P. Subbiah from 7.00 p.m. to 10.00 a.m. in the next day.\textsuperscript{61} The proprietor of Subash Textiles, with no other alternative tangible, yielded to the labourers. He declared 10 percent of bonus and the same was followed by the rest of the proprietors in Nagercoil area. M.Y.A. Wahab of Thengapattinam, once an office-bearer of D.M.K. affiliated Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavu Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam was utilized by the labourers to expose their cause in the negotiations and he was responsible for the settlement.\textsuperscript{62}

The working class agitation in 1990 demanding a higher bonus was successful. It was not due to the endeavours of a trade unions but

\textsuperscript{60} Personal Interview, Thavasimuthu, M., Nagercoil 19 November 1995.
\textsuperscript{61} Personal Interview with Subbiah, Proprietor, Subbiah Textiles, 17 December 2012.
\textsuperscript{62} Personal Interview, Wahab, M.Y.A., Thengapattinam, 21 December 1995.
due to the efforts of the labourers themselves. During this time, almost all the trade unions became defunct and lost their scope for revival. Thus the trade union in respect of handloom weaving industry lost its importance.