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## **HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE GROWTH OF TRADE UNION IN ORISSA**

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### **INTRODUCTION-**

Trade unionism today is the outcome of a long struggle of the working class. It is a process under which the habits and intentions of the employers are intended on the one hand and the working classes are organized to achieve their social and economic ends on the other. It is a long road from a laissez-faire state to the welfare state. The upsurge of Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and gradual growth of modern factory system created a class of landless proletariats. The working class realized that unless they are united, it was not possible for them to face the all powerful masters. Marx and Engels and their theories of class conflict influenced the working class for such collective action.<sup>1</sup>

In India, the modern factory system developed only in 1860's. The Indian Railway system developed during this period and a sense of unity and leadership developed during this period and a sense of unity and leadership developed only among the enlightened workers of Railways, Postal and other organizations. But trade union in its modern sense, was brought into existence in this country in 1918, with the formation of Madras Labour Union by B. P. Wadia. It opened the eyes of Indian working class.

### **History of trade union in Orissa-**

The new province of Orissa was born on 1st April 1936 but the origin of trade union movement in Orissa was older than that of this province. Taking a clue from the Annual report on the working of the Indian Trade Union Act. 1926 for the year ending 31st March 1937.<sup>2</sup> It can be safely said that Rice Mill Labour Association, Rambha was in existence as the only union prior to the formation of Orissa. But the question arises when this union was born. The Rice Mill Labour Association was born in the year 1935. Sujan Bhattacharya was made its first President. This trade union ceased to function in 1938, when the mill was closed due to financial difficulties.

In 1938 late Pyari Shankar Ray, a Congress man organized the press workers of Mission Press workers of Mission Press, Sarswata Press, Observer Press, Satyabadi Press, Navbharat Press, Kohinoor Press and Manmohan Press and the Press workers Union, Cuttack was formed on 1st March 1938.<sup>3</sup> This union was registered on 02.12.1939.<sup>4</sup> Following the press workers of Cuttack town, the works of the Cuttack Electric Supply Company were tempted and the 2<sup>nd</sup> union was

organized by late Pyari Shankar Ray on 1st June 1938. This union was registered on 06.12.1939.<sup>5</sup>Hence, till 1940 there were only two trade unions in Orissa in the manufacturing sector. The next trade union in the organized manufacturing sector came up in 1940 with the formation of Orient Paper Mills Workers Union, Brajarajnagar in the district of Sambalpur, Orissa.

Trade Union growth in Orissa was almost in dormant stage during 1941 (till August, 1944). No trade union was registered during this period.<sup>6</sup>Because the Congress Leaders who espoused 'Quit India Movement' in 1942 were put behind the bars. The Communist Party of India, which had captured the AITUC was active only in capturing the offices of the existing trade unions and they had little time at their disposal to organize fresh unions in Orissa.

The years 1945 and 1946 were the years of keen competition between Congress and Communist Parties to capture the working class votes in Orissa. Congress leaders like Pyari Shankar Ray, Sarat Chandra Sarkar, RadhanathRath and others organized 21 trade unions between 1945-1947. Similarly from the Communist Party of India, BaidyanathRath, SatyabadiRath and others organized 6 new Unions during this period and captured the leadership of Orient Paper Mill Workers Union, Brajaraj Nagar and Press Workers Union, Cuttack (1945-46). The involvement of trade unions in active politics was intensified in the hope of capturing the labour seat as provided under Government of India Act 1935. This is substantiated by the Annual Report on the working of the Indian Trade Union Act in the province of Orissa for the year ending 31st March, 1947.<sup>7</sup> In the provincial election held in 1945, the AITUC leader BaidyanathRath defeated the Congress leader Md. Hanif in the lone labour seat and entered to the state legislature. The success of Communist Party of India inspired the organizers of AITUC in Orissa and in the following years intensified their trade union activities. The abnormal increase in price level of essential commodities, following the 2nd World War facilitated the task of trade unionists in formation of trade unions. The period from 1946-47 to 1950-51 witnessed rapid growth of trade unions. It was mainly due to intensification of trade union activities by leader belonging to different political parties, particularly the Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India and Socialist Party. But in 1951-52 there was a sharp decline in the rate of growth of trade unions in Orissa. Prior to 1951, the power of registration of trade unions was vested with the Revenue Commissioner. When this work was transferred to Labour Commissioner as many as 60 trade unions were found defaulters in the submission of Annual Returns and more or less they were Defunct.

### **Growth of Trade Union in Orissa after Independence**

Industrial growth of Orissa entered into a new phase with the introduction of Five Year Plans. In the Public Sector, there was a big boost of industries with the installation of three major power plants namely Hirakud Dam Hydro Electric Project (1957), Machkund Hydro Electric Project (1958) and Talcher Thermal Power Station (1961) and one Steel Plant namely Rourkela Steel Plant, Rourkela (1960). Two major transport units namely Orissa Road Transport Company Limited, Berhampur (1951) and State Transport Service (1951) also came up in the state sector. The establishment of Industrial Development Corporation (1962) a state State Government undertaking brought 5 major industrial units including one steel and one cement. In the Private Sector too, two paper mills namely J. K. Paper Mill, Rayagada (1964), Titaghur Paper Mill, Chaudwar (1960), one cement industry namely Orissa

Cement Limited Rajgangpur (1959) two Aluminium Industries namely Indian Aluminium Company, Hirakud (1958) and Aluminium Industries, Hirakud (1959), one major Engineering Industry namely Utkal Machinery Limited, Kansahal (1960) with big employment potentials emerged in the industrial map of Orissa. In addition to this, the Choudwar Complex of industries with Orissa Textile Mill, Choudwar(1955) engineered by BijuPatnaikan and industrialist, also emerged. The contribution of Mr. Patnaik in changing the face of industrial map of Orissa needs no exaggeration. He took tangible steps for opening large scale factories both in the, private sector and public sector during his tenure of Chief Ministership in Orissa (1961-62). He had also his own mining unit namely Kalinga Mines, Keonjhar. In addition to this, mining establishment of Tata Iron and Steel Company in the district of Mayurbhanj, Bird and Company in Sundergarh district and Sirajuddin and Company in Keonjhar district in the private sector and National Mineral Development Corporation and Orissa Mining Corporation in the public sector come into operation. This growth of industries and exploration of mines in Orissa boosted the total employment and thus opened avenues for trade unionism in Orissa.

Press Workers Union, Cuttack was the first trade union to get affiliation with All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1939. In 1945, the chief Labour Commissioner, Central Government of India was asked to conduct an enquiry in order to ascertain as to which of the two organizations namely the AITUC and IFL (Indian Federation of Labour) was the most representative organization in the country and found that the AITUC was the most representative in ten provinces including Orissa. The trade unions led by the leaders of Indian National Congress in Orissa were affiliated to INTUC in 1947 on the very year of its inception. In the early days leaders like Nilamani Routray were the Chief Architects of the growth of INTUC led unions in Orissa. Dhuleswar Bastia, who founded trade unions in the mining establishments of Talcher area in Dhenkanal District, was the pioneer to espouse the extension and expansion of HMS in Orissa since 1948. The network of HMS spreaded over Choudwar, Rajgangpur, Cuttack, Rayagada, Rourkela, brajarajnagar, Talcher and few other places. 118 From 1953 to 1962-63 INTUC was the most representative Central trade Union organization. On the other hand, the AITUC was trailing behind in Orissa. The AITUC got a major shock in 1962-63 following the Chinese aggression and split in Communist Party in India. As a result of this, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was formed and it had its own central trade union organization namely CITU. The Bharatiya Jan Sangh Party in the meantime became interested in the affairs of working class and formed their own central organization of trade unions namely Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh. Thus in the subsequent years, two more parties namely CPI (M) and BJS with their Central organization (CITU and BMS) entered the race for politicalization of trade unions in Orissa.

Political developments inside the state also encouraged the growth of trade unions in Orissa. Every political party wanted to get a foot hold in the labour movement. The Central organization and their units in the state geared up their activities and there was a keen competition among them to organize trade unions in different industries. As a result of this multiple unions in a single concern emerged. The INTUC had its trade union leaders in Orissa during this period. Remarkable among them were Sarat Chandra Sarkar, Loknath Mishra, Nilamani Routray, Biren Mitra and other. The Hind Mazdoor Sabha had the most effective trade union organization during this period. The chief architect of this was Dhuleswar Bastia. He was a most dedicated trade unionist during 1940-65. The communist party of India, under whose fold the AITUC was functioning, also organized its efforts to the leadership of the working class this period. Beginning from Baidyanath Rath, the first CPI, M.L.A.

1946, the leaders like DurgaCharanMonhanty and Man Mohan Mishra, LokanathChoudhury and other fortified the foot holds of AITUC.

The year 1960-61 witnessed the greatest recession in the growth of trade unions in Orissa owing to the following reasons.

Firstly, at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Five Year Plan construction projects like HirakudDam were completed resulting in unemployment of thousands of workers and closure of trade union activities.

Secondly, due to severe political discontentment in the state due to fall of Dr. HarekrushnaMahatab's coalition ministry, the trade union leaders who were also active in politics remained busy otherwise. As such they could not submit Annual Returns of their unions as required under section-28 of the Trade Union Act, 1926 and action as deem proper under section 10 of the Trade Union Act, 1926 was taken by the Registrar of Trade Unions, Orissa.

During 1953-67 manufacturing industries witnessed a fast rate of growth of unions than non-manufacturing industries. The first trade union in Iron and Steel Industry, a major manufacturing industry in the state, Came up on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1954 (Regd on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1955) with the formation of Rourkela MazdoorSabha. Till 1987, this was the biggest trade union not only in Iron and Steel Industry but also in the State of Orissa. The Second ever politicalized trade union in the Iron and Steel Industry came up on 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1955 with the formation of Hindustan IspatSramikaSangha, Rourkela under the auspicious of GanatantraParishad (which merged subsequently with Swatantra Party in 1961, a state based political party. SurendranathMohanty (Janata M.P) was the pioneer in establishing this union and he was its first president. Since Sundargarh district was in ex-princely states, the Ganatantraparishad which was primarily a party of ex-rulers was active in Rourkela since then. But because of pro-capitalistic attitude of this party, the union established by Sri Mohanty did not last long and in 1955 it ceased to function. Since then theSwatantra Party although tried its best during 1967-71 when it was in power (Swatantra Jan Congress Coalition Ministry) could not gain over the workers substantially. In 1958, the Congress led INTUC captured the workers, engaged in Iron and Steel Industries with the formation of Rourkela Steel MazdoorSabha on 28th July 1958. Iron and Steel Industry having highest employment potential in the state had and has its privilege to occupy the top position in possessing the biggest trade union (Rourkela MazdoorSabha) and the average membership per trade union was 6543 in 1965. The first non-congress coalition Government came into being in the state in 1967. This favoured the opposition parties like Praja Socialist Party and Communist Party of India, who built their edifices on voices and verdicts of the working class. They gathered momentum in organizing trade unions in the state. Even in the next election to the State legislature held in 1971, Congress Party was not voted to office and a faction of Congress, styled as Utkal Congress, formed the coalition ministry.

### **Deficiencies in the Growth of Trade Unions in Orissa**

**1-Agrarian State-** Orissa is primarily an agrarian state on the basis of 1981 census out of 26,272,054 total population only 8,623,646 are working population. 121 Out of this working population 2,334,626 are agricultural labourers and 4,052,872 are marginal farmers (Cultivators)

**2- Illiteracy** : The working population of the state are mostly illiterate as the percentage of literacy in Orissa was 28 in 1981 (1981 Census). Lack of education and ignorance of workmen are the main impediments in the organization of trade union

**3-Poor Economic Conditions** : A recent survey with regard to the economic condition of the state indicates that nearly 88 percent of the total population in Orissa are living below the poverty line

**4- Employers Hostile Attitude-** Employers' hostile attitude towards trade unionism also affected the growth of trade unions in most of the marginal industrial units in the state

**5-Seasonal Character of Industries-** It is another impediment for happy trade union growth in Orissa. Out of 1936 registered factories (1987) in the state nearly 400 factories are saw mills and rice mills which are mostly seasonal in nature.

**6- Limited Bigger Industrial Units-** Trade unions mostly grow in bigger industrial units where large number of workers are engaged at a place. In Orissa out of 1936 working factories (1987) only 120 are registered factories employing 100 or more workers and 1/3 of the total working factories employ 10 or less number of workers. In 1987 only 25 percent of total trade unions were functioning in industries employing less than 100 workers.

**7- Busy Engagement of Trade Union Leaders-** Trade Union work has also suffered for want of time on the part of its leaders. The trade union leaders either insiders or outsiders, full time or part time, engage themselves in multifarious activities and they get limited time for pursuing trade union activities.

**8- Fake Unionism-**The real picture of trade unionism to some extent remains as a mystery when the managements encourage fake trade unions to get registered.

**9- Inflated Membership-** One typical example of inflated membership is the case of the two unions in Kalinga Tubes Limited, Choudwar, Cuttack. The management have taken licence for employment of 800 workmen.

After independence every major political party tried to control the trade unions for their self-interests. The Congress Party and other socialist groups tried to do some social service on the surface and organized trade unions to win working class votes and utilize the trade union forum for their political base. The Communists and the radicals with an ultimate aim of total revolution in the Country, organized the working class. This task was facilitated by Trade Union Act of 1926.

Since the inside trade union leadership is still in infancy in India, the National Labour Commission 1969 did not suggest to impose any legal ban for outside leadership. But it has suggested the following measures for building up internal leadership.

- a) **Intensification of workers education;**
- b) **Penalties for victimization and similar unfair labour practices;**
- c) **Intensification of efforts by trade union organizers to train workers in union organization;**
- d) **Limiting the proportion of the outsiders in the union executives;**

e) **Treating the ex-employees as insiders;**

f) **Establishing a convention that no union office bearers will concurrently hold office in a political party.**

### **Relevance of growth of trade unions in Orissa-**

There is happy growth of trade unions and that indicates a bright future for trade unionism in Orissa. As regards to the potentialities of industrial development in the state, it is encouraging because of vast reserves of mineral and other natural resources. The completion of rail link to mines and with the major industries will receive impetus and thereby the pace of industrialization in the state will be accelerated. The liberalized economic policy, the flow of multi-national corporation to the state for establishment of industries in agricultural and industrial sector and the state government's industrial policy and its efforts in creating and enlarging infrastructure facilities are very encouraging. The future development of industries in Orissa will be extremely important if the trade union movement in the state is to receive a big boost with Swatantra Party as its ally in 1971. But this did not last long because of the internal strifes and ambition of a segment of legislators to build their fortune under the banner of Indian National Congress which was in office in the Central Government. This led to the floor crossing of a group of Utkal Congress and Swatantra members and formation of Congress Government in June 1972. Since then Congress was in power till 1977 with a short spell of presidential rule in 1975.

Thus trade union leadership in Orissa is dubbed in many peculiarities like multiple leadership, politicalised leadership, vested interest leadership and dedicated leadership. In the initial stage of trade union movement in Orissa, though the trade union leaders with a definite design and goal entered the movement, their main motive was philanthropic and social service. Gradually, with the emergence of multiparty system and development of selfish designs, it leads towards a state of morbid confusion. The behavior of trade unions and the leaders has been reflected in a greater detail in connection with their involvement in politics and allied matters.

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