



Research Article

TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY IN POWER SECTOR: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Industrialism and democracy have been considered as inter-related by social and political theorists with widely divergent approaches towards political and social order. Also, the labour unions have been in the vanguard in the flight for democracy. The labour movement has also played a significant role in fostering the ideology of equalitarianism. The Indian polity accords a legitimate place for trade unions. Thus, this paper an attempt is made to know the perceptions of trade union leaders and members on trade union democracy In Rayalaseema Thermal Power Plant, Kalamala, Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh. To test and analyze the above, the survey was conducted, questionnaire method using interview schedule was adopted for data collection and statistical tools were used for analysis. Data is interpreted and ideas for effectiveness of trade union democracy in the RTPP are suggested the conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Industrialism and democracy have been considered as inter-related by social and political theorists with widely divergent approaches towards political and social order. Also, the labour unions have been in the vanguard in the flight for democracy. The labour movement has also played a significant role in fostering the ideology of equalitarianism. The Indian polity accords a legitimate place for trade unions. The following indicate the perspective of Indian polity: A socialistic society is built up not solely on monetary incentives, on ideas of service to society and the willingness on the part of the latter to recognize such service. It is necessary in this context that the worker should be made to feel that in his own way he is building a progressive State. The creation of industrial democracy, therefore, is a prerequisite for the establishment of a socialist society.

Trade Unions and Democratic Values

Trade union democracy must be addressed on two levels; namely internal and external. The internal aspects of trade union democracy deal with institutional mechanism and processes that ensure unrestricted participation of members in the affairs of the union. The external dimension of union democracy on the other hand involves the extent to which relationships, policies and processes in the society shape the democratic aspirations of the trade union movement.

A number of issues are involved in the internal aspects of trade union democracy. One of these is the fact that mandate and legitimacy should flow from workers/members. As voluntary organization of workers, unions must be run and led by freely chosen leaders (Gitlow and Abraham, ?). The legitimacy of trade union leadership will rest on the extent members periodically elect their members without restriction. Periodic elections are important at the level of key visible national office holders. Elections are also indispensable for the branches and zonal offices of the union. Only through free exercise of the right to vote and be voted for by union members at all levels of union leadership will members have true sense of belonging and ownership of their organization.

The beauty of legitimacy that flows from workers mandate is that workers who confer legitimacy will be willing to defend their organization while elected leaders are assured of workers support. When management/government tactics and strategies will assume different and unpredictable dimensions, union will only overcome the crisis of legitimacy if workers freely chose and elect their leaders. Another important issue is that of accountability and transparency.

Once leaders are freely chosen in free elections what will guarantee trade union democracy is the accountability and transparency dealings of elected leaders. Leaders of the union must not only be seen to fulfill the objectives they elected to pursue but also to give their members account of their stewardship.

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Democratic trade union organizations must ensure that elected leaders fulfill their mandate to members on the core issues which include; (i) improvement of workers welfare with particular reference to improved compensation, (ii) promotion of just and fair employment practices and (iii) represent and advance the needs of workers in the larger society. The union leaders must transparently be seen to do so (Oluranti Samuel and KehindeKester, ?).

Characteristics of union democracy

A democratic union is characterized by

- leadership emerging from rank-and-file through periodical, fair elections held on the basis of secret ballot.
- leadership securing sanction of the union members on all important issued concerning the union through either
- secret ballot on issues such as going on strike, or
- holding of frequent General Body meetings;
- Leadership maintaining close relationships contacts.
- To create full awareness of union activities among the members and
- To provide a channel for ventilation of labour grievances; and

To inculcate a feeling for ventilation of labour grievances; and confidence by the leadership even in minority sections of the union, such as small groups of workers belonging to a particular trade (Devaki Devi, 1991).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Godard, (2003) Trade unions have grown in relevance over the years especially in the light of the belief that a healthy, independent labour movement is essential to democracy, (Godard 2003). Furthermore, there is a growing international recognition of the right to freely associate in unions and to engage in collective bargaining as a fundamental human right. This was affirmed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 1995 and the World Trade Organization (WTO), in1996 (Godard, 2003). Alalade, (2004) the author attempted to find out through interviews the contribution of major Trade Unions on the new democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The major Trade Unions, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) demonstrate their own interpretation of the concept of Democracy.

Through their members who also belong to various political parties in the country, the Trade Unions have participated in debates as to how Nigeria could make progress by defending democracy. The gender issue that advocates full participation of women in Trade Unionism as well as in governance and also the patriotic style of Trade Union demands are points discussed in the article. Governments also have come to realize that Trade Unions have demonstrated their willingness to work with political leaders in order to meet with complex requirement and fulfillment for better life for Nigerians. Crooke (2005) In talking about democratic value in trade unions, he states that itwill be out of place not to make reference to the anti-union legislation of the past 25years, or changes in the union structures over the same period and the effects ofthese phenomena had on democratization of the union.

It must also be mentionedthat in the past, there was a higher level of union membership, militancy, etc in allcountries. He further asserts that “unions should be structured (e.g. election of all officials, policy-making bodies to be made up of elected lay members only), the relationship of unions should be to the state (i.e. one of full independence). He further advocates for increased membership involvement, such as the call for “shop stewards to be elected at mass meetings.”

NagarajuBattu and P. Ambedkar, (2006) conducted a study on trade union democracy in new economic environment with reference to Singareni Coalmines and Calories Limited. In SCCL 17 registered unions were existed during 2004 to 2006. Among these registered 5 trade unions were selected, from each union 10 leaders and 20 members were taken for sample for study by adopting simple random sample technique. Their findings are with regard to union meetings is that the leaders attend most of the meetings where as members attended very few of the meetings do to the family problems and work load in the place of work.

The leaders of the sampled unions were elected through consensus. The procedure of decision making in a trade union is another important indicator of democracy. The study reveals that as far as the central issues are concerned, decisions are taken based on the discussions in central organization and voluntary ratification by the general body and the executive body. A fair channel of communication between the leadership and membership are direct contact with the executive channels. The members are given fair opportunities to give complaints individually of collective to the union leaders. They discuss matters connected with the union activities. The result convinces to conclude that the trade union democracy is prevailing among the unions under study.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The present study is concerned with union democracy. It is a belief that political democracy should be extended to all walks of life of the workers. In industries, the workers step into the shoes of democracy through various participative management systems. Now-a-days most of the workers are members of the unions. The union in turn works for betterment of its members. Trade union is an organization which is also expected to follow the democratic principles in its working. The study pertains to the trade unions in the RTPP. The trade unions should voluntary societies for the sake of their own freedom of actions and in the interest of democracy. The present study is an attempt to find out the democracy existing in the functioning of trade unions. The study was carried out among the eleven trade unions existing in RTPP, KalamalaKadapa District of Andhra Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

- To study the socio-economic profile of the respondents in the study area.
- To analyze the perceptions of trade union leaders and members on trade union democracy
- To offer suggestions for effectiveness of trade union democracy in the RTPP.

HYPOTHESIS

The following hypotheses were also raised in order to establish significant relationship among the variables of the study:

- **H₁:** The greater satisfaction with the present position and not changing over to other union, the higher the scope of democracy.
- **H₂:** The higher rate of participation in activities and free flow of communication, the greater the chances of democracy.
- **H₃:** The active support for selecting the leaders in elections, the more scope of democracy.
- **H₄:** The more involvement in decision making and come to know of all decisions, the larger the chances of democracy
- **H₅:** The greater involvement in the discussions in meetings and easily accessible of leaders, the higher the level of democracy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Present study is carried out in Rayalaseema Thermal Power Plant, Kalamala, Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh. It is one of the major power generating facilities in Andhra Pradesh of APGENCO to meet the growing demand for power in the Southern part of the state. In view of the objectives of the study, an exploratory research design was adopted along with a touch of descriptive research design in order to relate different between variables. The study was combination of Historical, Case Study and Survey Methods. The total population is 1800 employees. From them 165 trade union leaders and members were selected as sample size for the study by adopting purposive sampling technique. There were eleven registered trade unions in RTPP. To represent each union the researcher has selected five leaders and ten members from each union. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected by using schedule prepared by Dr. Devaki Devi, Same was adopted my study and collect the data. The secondary data was collected from the internal records of the organization. The collected data was analyzed by using well established statistical tools and techniques with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.0 version. Simple percentage is used for the socio-economic and other aspects of the study to find out the majority of the respondents opinions. Mean to know the averages of the variables. Chi-Square to see the association/relationship among the variables.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows Chi-Square test attempted by taking parameters to know that there is democracy among the trade union members and leaders. The test is tested at 0.05% level of significance.

Trade union membership/leadership: The alternative hypothesis states that H₁: The greater satisfaction with the present position and not changing over to other union, the higher the scope of democracy. The chi-square result reveals that the assumed significance value is .000 that is less than 0.05% level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. The implication of these results that there is greater satisfaction and understanding among the members and leaders which leads to union democracy.

Participation in union activities, meetings & communication: The alternative hypothesis states that H₂: The higher rate of participation in activities and free flow of communication, the greater the chances of democracy. The chi-square result reveals that the assumed significance value is .000 that is less than 0.05% level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there is greater participation in activities and free flow of communication between the members and leaders which leads to union democracy.

Elections: The alternative hypothesis states that H₃: The active support for selecting the leaders in elections, the more scope of democracy. The chi-square result reveals that the assumed significance value is .000 that is less than 0.05% level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. This is evidence from the result that the members actively support their leaders and have understanding among them which leads to union democracy.

Decision Making: The alternative hypothesis states that H₄: The more involvement in decision making and come to know of all decisions, the larger the chances of democracy. The chi-square result reveals that the assumed significance value is .000 that is less than 0.05% level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. It is clear from the result that the members are involving in decision making and come to know of all the decisions taken in the meeting by the leaders which leads to union democracy.

Member/Leader Contacts: The alternative hypothesis states that H₅: The greater involvement in the discussions in meetings and easily accessible of leaders, the higher the level of democracy. The chi-square result reveals that the assumed significance value is .000 that is less than 0.05% level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. It proves from the result that the members and leaders discusses general as well as official matters and freely and easily accessible of leaders to the members which leads to union democracy.

RESULTS

- Majority of the respondents i.e., 37.6% & 32.1% are between the age group of 31 to 50 years.
- 77.0% of the respondents are males 23.0% of them are females.
- Technical Education qualification respondents are 57.0%.
- 33.3% & 24.8 % of the respondents are workman staff respectively.
- 44.2% of the respondents' native place is semi-urban area.
- A large number 72.1% of respondents' mother tongue is Telugu.
- More than half 63% of the respondents know English language.
- Respondents' state of domicile is Andhra Pradesh 86.7%.
- 52.7 % of the respondents belong to Hindu religion.
- 38.2% & 31.5% of the respondents are OC & OBC respectively.
- A good number of 76.4% respondents are married.
- Many respondents 83.6% are maintaining nuclear families.

Table 1. Chi-Square Test of Trade Union Democracy

S.No	Parameters	Assumption Significance	0.05% level of significance	Hypothesis Accepted/Rejected
1	Trade union membership/leadership	.000	0.05%	H ₁ is rejected
2	Participation in union activities, meetings & communication	.000	0.05%	H ₁ is rejected
3	Elections	.000	0.05%	H ₁ is rejected
4	Decision Making	.000	0.05%	H ₁ is rejected
5	Member/Leader Contacts	.000	0.05%	H ₁ is rejected

- More than half 60.0% of the respondents have three dependents.
- 47.9% of the respondents are having 15 to 25 years of job service.
- The respondents 31.5% and 21.2% belong to category of Rs. 25,000 - 30,000/- salary per month
- 43.6% of the respondents lives in company quarters.
- 44.2% of the respondents use bike as their mode of transport.
- 27.9% and 23.6% of the respondents have 7 to 20 years of service in trade union.
- 61.2% of the respondents are satisfied with the present position in the trade union.
- 73.9% of the respondents they do not have leadership in the other unions.
- 37.6% of the unions sometimes participate in social associations.
- Majority of the respondents 92.7% are not ceased to be a member of the union at any time.
- 83.0 % of the respondents have not change over to any other union in the same organisation.
- 80.0% of the respondents gave rating as the most effective to their union when compared with others in the organization.
- 47.9% of the respondents have ever been elected or nominated for elections.
- 48.5% of the respondents have opined that elections should be conducted if necessary.
- 86.1% of the respondents participate all the time in the elections in the present union.
- 38.2% of the respondents prefer secret ballot method for selecting the executive members.
- 83.0% of the respondents actively support executive committee member.
- 73.9% of the respondents are contestant for office.
- 83.0% of the respondents rarely issue a call for a strike by the union executive committee members.
- 37.0% of the respondents are sometimes participating in decision making.
- 49.1% of the respondents follow consensus method for decision making in the executive committee meetings.
- 26.1% of the respondents opine that decisions are taken through the Central Organisation and voluntary ratification by the General Body/ Executive Body/.
- 66.7% of the respondents are satisfied with the decision making process in the trade union.
- The trade unions are satisfied with membership and leadership. They actively participate in the social associations, decision making process, and discussion of General Body/Executive Body meetings. Only least number of trade unions are expelled. They send resolutions to include in General Body Agenda and suggest amendment

to officials. They are also satisfied with the communication between them.

- The trade unions participate and also nominate in the elections. They prefer secret ballot and consensus method for selecting the executive members. They actively support the members. The members come to know of all the decision taken by the leaders/executives. The members maintain close friendly relations with the leaders and executives. They educate the members about decisions. The leaders are freely and easily accessible to their members.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

H₁: The greater satisfaction with the present position and not changing over to other union, the higher the scope of democracy. The chi-square test gives the result of $\chi^2 = .000 < 0.05\%$ level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. The implication of this result is that there is greater satisfaction, confidence and understanding among the members and leaders which leads to union democracy.

H₂: The higher rate of participation in activities and free flow of communication, the greater the chances of democracy. The chi-square test gives the result of $\chi^2 = .000 < 0.05\%$ level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. It makes sense that the greater participation of members in meetings, social activities and interactions fosters the greater democracy among the unions.

H₃: The active support for selecting the leaders in elections, the more scope of democracy. The chi-square test gives the result of $\chi^2 = .000 < 0.05\%$ level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. This is evidence from the result that the members actively support their leaders and have understanding among them which leads to union democracy.

H₄: The more involvement in decision making and come to know of all decisions, the larger the chances of democracy. The chi-square test gives the result of $\chi^2 = .000 < 0.05\%$ level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. It is clear from the result that the members are involving in decision making and come to know of all the decisions taken in the meeting by the leaders which leads to union democracy.

H₅: The greater involvement in the discussions in meetings and easily accessible of leaders, the higher the level of democracy. The chi-square test gives the result of $\chi^2 = .000 < 0.05\%$ level of significance. The test has accepted the alternative hypothesis. It proves from the result that the members and leaders discuss general as well as official matters in the meetings and freely and easily accessible of leaders to the members which leads to union democracy.

SUGGESTIONS

- Aside from its association with workplace power, the organizing approach is also aligned with democratization which emerges as a crucial factor in building power. The development of support networks from the union office for workplace leaders, and role clarity for leaders are also important.
- It is suggested that the unions should feel as a democratic society environment so that they give full strength of support to their leaders and not to initiate a harsh political climate in the trade union activities.
- There should be an engaging of members in decision-making on the union issues that affect their daily lives and thereby expanding the education regarding decisions, developing their capacities, and thus boost the confidence in themselves and their collective power as unions.
- To reduce the discouraged membership participation in the unions there should be a demonstration that the substitutability of union members' organisational incentives and a union's major form of employment bargaining should be recognized as two additional key predictors of trade union democracy.
- There should be a free flow of information between the leaders and members which is a crucial aspect of two-way communication that leads to understanding of union agendas that help in bargaining power, collective agreement and resolve issues of due process.
- Intra-union rivalries should be settled within the union so that to strengthen the union and to have smooth going activities.
- The unions should economically fit as to develop and to meet the requirements of the union.
- There should be participatory decision making in all aspects of union decisions which fosters the reliability among them
- As per the union constitution the participation in agendas should be decided, too many hands of participation remains weak.
- Participation in the social activities fosters the friendly relations not only among the members of one union but also the other union members.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study is a starting point for further research with additional studies needed to refine and develop additional measures of trade union democracy.

The study attempted to understand the impact of the leaders and members relations of the trade unions. Apparently, unions should foster a liberal democratic notion of democracy, such as representativeness, responsiveness and desirable electoral processes; that is, the ability to consult and voice one's views with others within the union.

Of course much of this is already required by relevant industrial legislation, but fostering a liberal democratic notion of democracy also requires developing appropriate communication channels to facilitate members' interaction with other trade union constituents. The relative influence of electoral process, political involvement, free flow of communication, increase in the membership of the unions, supporting each other, understanding among union members, etc. are the factors deserve to be tested by using large samples. It is also suggested for further research taking the aspects of age of the organization, age of the trade union, religion, financial status, etc.,. However, establishing any link between union participation in labour activities and the lowering of the multiplicity of unions is beyond the scope, and can be taken up as an area of further research.

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