

Impact of Working- Class Movements in Kanyakumari District

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ABSTRACT

The chief feature of the Indian village community was a “harmonious coordination of the specialized functions of its various component groups of workers”. During the second half of the 19th century, the cotton textile jute mills and railways employed thousands of workers. But there were no labour organizations or labour leaders for the welfare of the workers. The Labour leadership mostly consisted of well-intentioned social workers, who were mainly guided by humanitarian considerations. The trade union movement in India as a response to the challenges faced by the working class as a consequence of industrial development. Kanyakumari district has many trade unions and trade union leaders. K.L.S. Santhanam is a glorified leader of a trade union in the Kanyakumari district. He succeeded to empower the workers to bargain for their legitimate rights. To protect the workers from the clutches of the landowners and shop owners, these unions helped a lot for the working-class people of the Kanyakumari district. This union after the establishment could well organize themselves and unite the working-class people at the various community and fought for their well-being. Like INTUC the activities at the CITU in the Kanyakumari district were many. After a long period of struggle conducted by the unions, they had achieved and come up with a good life and got benefits one after another. Many beneficial schemes such as welfare funds, education aid, delivery benefit schemes, pension schemes, marriage aid, diseases aid, dead person fund, family pension, accident fund and higher education fund, etc. have been received by them. The activities of INTUC and CITU made the workers flourishing in richness and remove poverty. Further, the activities of these unions helped the workers to make them equal in work, equal in wages. Because of all these efforts of the union, the standard of living of the workers became very high in society.

KEY WORDS: Labour leadership – community – coordination – organizations – challenges – development - trade unions – empower – establishment - working-class - INTUC – CITU – workers

Introduction:

During medieval times also India was predominantly an agricultural country. The basic unit of the economic organization was a village. The chief feature of the Indian village community was a “harmonious coordination of the specialized functions of its various component groups of workers”. There were several rural industries like the making of ropes, baskets, manufacture of

scent, oil, etc. Weaving, dyeing, leather works, and woodworks also functioned in the villages. Apart from the cottage industries other industries such as the textile industries made remarkable progress during this period. During the second half of the 19th century, the cotton textile jute mills and railways employed thousands of workers. But there were no labour organizations or labour leaders for the welfare of the workers. The Labour leadership mostly consisted of well-intentioned social workers, who were mainly guided by humanitarian considerations. They were deeply distressed at the miserable conditions of the workers. So they were prompted by a feeling of sympathy rather than of rendering justice to labour as partners in production.

Trade Union Movement:

The trade union movement in India as a response to the challenges faced by the working class as a consequence of industrial development. Trade unionism began in England in the name of New Model Unions around 1850. When the trade union movement was stabilizing itself in Britain, the first modern factory was being set up in India. Kanyakumari district has many trade unions and trade union leaders. Karnik in his historical survey of the Indian Trade Union attempted to classify earlier leaders into several groups. Some leaders took to trade unionism as a result of their philanthropic and humanitarian desire to serve the working class next group comprised of Gandhian leaders who took to trade union activities as a part of their special work. Then there were the communists who wanted to utilize trade union as forums for preaching their ideal. K.L.S. Santhanam is a glorified leader of a trade union in the Kanyakumari district. He succeeded to empower the workers to bargain for their legitimate rights. He performed the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organization which bind together the members of a class and a historic bloc into a common identity. For any group to achieve dominance and to make its conception of the world, hegemonic and then to reproduce the hegemony demands organization.

Trade Unions:

The way of threatening the security and the welfare of the community and is inimical to the best interests of the workers themselves. To protect the workers from the clutches of the landowners and shop owners, these unions helped a lot for the working-class people of the Kanyakumari district. This union after the establishment could well organize themselves and unite the working-class people at the various community and fought for their well-being. The unions often conducted meetings whenever the workers were affected by their low wages, pensions, etc. This union brought the daily difficulties that they get from their factories would be brought to the notice of the government to achieve their goal. The activities of INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) in the Kanyakumari district are many.

The most important one is to fight for the concession for the Artisan skilled workers. Their economic condition was pitiable though they worked very hard. Their standard of living was very low comparing the other working-class people. The condition was explained by the members of the union and the skilled workers would get a lot of benefits. The skilled workers who were benefitted were Tailor workers, Barber workers, Headload workers, Auto and Taxi workers and Fisheries workers. Like INTUC the activities at the CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions) in the Kanyakumari district were many. The leaders and members at this Union worked for

Impact of Working- Class Movements in Kanyakumari District

the welfare of the Tamil Nadu state fishery workers, Head load General workers, Sea Food Preservation Labours, Tamil Nadu state motors Transport workers, skilledworkers like hairdressers, Beauticians, workers from stitching field cutting mason, stitching mason Hard Workers, Embroidery design workers, paper distributors, butchers, small scale merchants, servants of small institutions, chapel manufacturers, bag manufacturers and goldsmiths. The consistent working-class workers especially the fisherfolk were very poor and they met a variety of hardships in the sea and their family suffered a lot. After a long period of struggle conducted by the unions, they had achieved and come up with a good life and got benefits one after another. Many beneficial schemes such as welfare funds, education aid, delivery benefit schemes, pension schemes, marriage aid, diseases aid, dead person fund, family pension, accident fund and higher education fund, etc. have been received by them.

The CITU and INTUC:

The CITU and INTUC are two separate Trade Unions for the working classes. They also organized unions under two separate divisions. These two unions have achieved their goal to unite together the coolies, Washerman, Barbers, Small Scale Industries, Fishermen and Head Load Coolies. The impact of the working-class Movement in the Kanyakumari district has made great achievements not only for the working-class people but also to the society in the Kanyakumari district as a whole. The very first impact of this movement has paved the way for the improvement of the fishermen's standard of living. The union aimed to get benefits such as a marriage fund, an educational concession to their children, and a pension scheme for the old age fishery workers of Colachel, Muttam, Thengapattinam, Kovalam and Manakudy of Kanyakumari district. Before the 1980s the workers in the building sector were unorganized. There were no laws to protect these workers who spent their time inefficient hand art like some of the buildings, bridges, dams, roads, etc. There were no laws to which provided concessions and rights for them. During the 1980s in Bengal CITU tried its best to organize these workers and form a union named construction workers union. This organization worked all over India so some union and welfare fund organizations were formed in the states like Kerala, Bengal

Family Benefit Scheme

The workers union started welfare funds and family benefits schemes. The general body met every year and elected the Union President. A scheme by name workers Bhark Scheme and some other states. In 1990 a law was established in Kerala. Due to many strikes and agitations in 1996 central Government passed Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund Act. In 1998 according to this in Kerala, a Board was formed and activities were started.

Impact of INTUC on Working Class:

The leadership of the INTUC came from the intelligentsia. They are revolutionary. Under the leadership of these great revolutionary the working-class movement in the Kanyakumari district become very prominent and because of the agitations conducted by leader's of the various union the working-class people got economic, social and political freedom. Further, their walks of life could also be changed and the working-class people could be considered as equal to the members of other people. A great of INTUC was the impact of working-class life among those of

other unions. This union has come forward to work among them. As a result of that, people were attracted more by this union and artisans and other skilled workers joined as members in this union.

The union has also formed a construction workers union. As a result, many artisans and skilled workers, building construction workers could get great benefits. They have also formed welfare committees. Their functionaries are drawn mostly from the educated middle class and white-collar employees. Over the years they remained at the forefront of the labour movement. Broadly speaking, the intelligentsia provided the leadership of the Trade Union and tried to build a cadre from the working class. Most frequently, the cadres were drawn from skilled workers. In the Kanyakumari district, there were labour leaders from the services and profession. Further, leaders were belonging to Blacksmith, Drivers and Conductors, Masons, Barbers, Mill assistant, Taxi and Motor drivers. Coolie, Sub-Contractors and Seaman.

which provided a pension to the workers who were more than 60 years old. The INTUC provided money to the family members of the workers for marriage. The marriage aid was Rs.2000/- and Rs.3000/- to the worker's family. During the delivery time, the union supplied Rs.3600/- for female workers. When a worker dies during the period of his work, the union paid Rs. 1 lakh as compensation for his hard work. It helped to grow up the family till it comes up to a good stage.

Thus it is seen that the union of the working class Movement formulated for the main demand of the workers that included a proportionated increase in total earning for extra time workers, no victimization, payment wages for the period during which the workers had been on strike, provision of maternity benefits and creation of a board to consider other grievance on the workers. When the strike continued, leaflet literature produced by workers union increased in volume to popularise such demands as the 8 hour labour in a day, minimum wage maternity benefits, and care with pay during illness. This union not only worked for the development of the economic condition of the working-class people but also they worked very hard to improve their standard of living and achieved it from the government and through necessary help from the other unions. If it was necessary to fight, the union would always be ready. Union gave protection through struggles and compromise. When they are loading up and down from the shops there occurred some trouble among them. That is why this union interferes through negotiation and it is necessary to go on strike. So that problems will be solved. If their problems can be solved, they will try to prevent recitals. Union achieved their rights according to law. INTUC has also made many aids. Delivery aid was one among them. Many families were getting benefits and they have been helped till now.

Impact of CITU on Working Class

Like other unions, the impact of CITU on the life and culture of the working-class people is remarkable. The fishery workers from Kerala became a good example for the fishery workers

from different parts of India. Due to the agitations conducted often under the leadership of CITU, the government offered insurance without making any economical expenditure from the fishery workers. The CITU activities reorganized the fishery workers and made them improve their culture and economic condition. However, to achieve the benefits for the working-class people amidst of heavy position from the part of rich people. This union leads many agitations to attain the rights of the head-load workers. The CITU Union conducted it for the upliftment of these down-trodden people and to improve the standard of their life. The union organized strikes and conducted two High Court marches. Thousands of workers participated in these agitations. The CITU decided to conduct an indefinite strike to attain proper rights for the workers from the government. A propagation rally for this strike was conducted in the district. Thus CITU helped the workers in attaining many rights and concessions by conducting many strikes and agitations.

Welfare Fund

Welfare Fund is an organization that is highly recommended all over India and all over the world. The CITU Union claimed that if a pensioner dies half the amount of pension must be given to the husband or the wife as a family pension, and the amount should not be less than the minimum pension. If death happens during his labour then his or her family must be given Rs.1 lakh as a welfare fund. If it is an ordinary death, the family will be given Rs.2500/- as welfare fund as well as Interest. The Union also took all effort to get economic, education and delivery benefit. The most affected working-class people were the Building workers. They were suffering a lot because of their poor economic condition. To self right their difficulties, the CITU Union welfare fund took various steps to alleviate their poverty. Accordingly, the welfare fund economic benefits, Marriage benefits and delivery benefits were attained by the CITU for the workers, the great impact of the CITU union on the working class were the achievements of the schemes like the Benefits schemes, welfare schemes, Compensation, and aid to the workers family. These schemes have made a steady and standard life of the working- class people of the Kanyakumari district. Although strikes become frequent in the Industrial center of Kanyakumari district from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, the Trade Union gave the fundamental Institution of working-class self-defense, came into its own late in the day. The strike committee often disappeared after the strike was settled. It seems that only an embryonic Trade Union exists in the year 1980. What is noteworthy is that the response to the strike was fairly general among Government employees and their strong Union consist of white-collar employees. The communists and socialists who were active in the Trade Unions of the Kanyakumari district from 1980 onwards generally came from the educated middle class.

The social composition of the leadership of Trade Unions which was intellectuals and middle class hardly changed over the years. As for the working-class movement of Kanyakumari district is concerned that their strike demonstrates the solidarity of workers as well as the influence of the Union. Mass meetings were regularly held and hundreds of volunteers were enrolled. The Union gave relief to the strikers untill the end of the strike. It seems that the Unionists achieved much success in retaining their hold on the fishing workers of the Kanyakumari district. Further, the High court March instance can be regarded as the red Citadel of the Kanyakumari district working-class movement. The area was steeped in the labour movement as they trained an army of working-class cadres. Some of these cadres remained at the forefront of the continuous

strikes and struggles. It is noted that the leaders emphasized the need to follow democratic methods during a strike, there is a place for Autocracy in Labour Movement. What was imperative was that the best workers should be trained at the work of Trade Unionism in all its departments. What was demonstrated in the strike of the workers was the tenacity of the workers who held meetings almost every day. Collect funds and offered relief to the strikers. During the period the working-class people had ready to face firing and arrest and lengthy trials in the court of laws. The working-class movement is not a local one nearly but one affects hold Kanyakumari district.

Conclusion:

Kanyakumari is a reputed district in Tamil Nadu. Simple inhabits the people of the district have only limited wants. Most people are happy with austere opportunities and conveniences. The district is inhabited by a different caste of people who are Industrious and hard working. It is a district of self-sufficient and self-satisfied in their day-to-day needs. Having fine natural resources Kanyakumari is the historically significant district of Tamil Nadu. The credit for initiating a working-class movement in the Kanyakumari district falls to the credit of the Trade Unions of CITU and INTUC. These Trade Unions seem to be dominated by a loose and complex structure and do not conform to a single pattern. Industry-wise, as well as sector-wise variations are commonly evident. In general, in the Industrial sector Unions are mostly organized at the enterprise level while in the service sector these are industry-wide unions. INTUC was formed by a group of labour leaders of the Kanyakumari district. The policy pursued by the AITUC under the communist leadership which functioned in its name stands in sharp and total conflict with our aims. Thus the activities of INTUC and CITU made the workers flourishing in richness and remove poverty. Further, the activities of these unions helped the workers to make them equal in work, equal in wages. Because of all these efforts of the union, the standard of living of the workers became very high in society.

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Impact of Working- Class Movements in Kanyakumari District

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