WORKERS’ DESIRE FOR UNION PARTICIPATION IN THE WAKE OF GLOBALISATION

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This paper identifies the extent of unionization, union participation and factors affecting workers’ desire to participate in union. In spite of the world-wide erosion of trade union membership in the context of economic globalisation, this paper reveals a high degree of unionisation with intense interest of workers towards trade unionism, but thin per union membership density due to fragmentation of unions on political grounds. Economic and material benefits, security, solidarity, alienation along with the job dissatisfaction and political consciousness have emerged as the important factors in determining workers’ desire for union participation. Least confidence on trade unions and their leaders, fear of victimisation and multiplicity of unions in political background appear to be major factors creating apathetic attitudes of workers towards unionism. Implications of the findings are discussed in the light of improving unionisation and participation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Declining trade union membership in number and density throughout the world is a serious challenge to trade union movement. Many studies have shown a decline in union density and membership in number of nations including Britain, USA, and India (see Kochan and Weinstein, 1994; ILO, 1997; Das, 2000; Bhattacharjee, 2001; Mishra, 2001; Charlwood 2002; Kuruvilla et al., 2002; Verma et al., 2002; and D’ Art and Turner, 2003). The cost cutting competition, global plight of capital, downsising of enterprises, outsourcing, subcontracting, adoption of advanced technology and new human resource policies and flexible employment practices of employers in the emerging global scenario of business have created the problems of unemployment and workforce reduction. Similarly, de-reservation, pro-investor, privatisation, disinvestment, liberalised imports, the deregulation policies of the state, in the stir of globalisation and market economy, have made a number of workers jobless, among others. On the other hand, such a situation has weakened the numerical strength of unions for the protection of the interest of workers through collective effort. In such a context, it is hardly surprising that the unionised component of the workforce has not grown in numerical strength (Jha, 2005). Trade unions have been loosing their bargaining power because ‘trade unions derive their power basically from their membership or more specifically, their members relative to the workforce levels at a point of time in a given space’ (Shyam Sundar, 2003, pp.287). According to Srivastava (2006, p.361) reasons for the declining influence of trade unions are: volatile market, increasing competition, emerging business compulsion, direct dialogue between employees and management, relocation of manufacturing operation to non-unionised site, the changed profile and aspirations of new generation of workforce, non-adherence to the democratic values within union, changing attitudes of government in granting permission to closure and or retrenchment, and disinterest of union leader towards the future of workforce and quality of inside leadership.

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All these are posing challenges to trade unions in making union attractive, organising the unorganised workers and retaining the membership due to persistent workforce reductions in practice of the new forms of work organisations in an open market economy.

Strong trade union is required to maintain harmonious relations, introduce changes, avoid adverse reactions of trade unions on the decisions of management and protect the interests of workers. Thus, to make it strong, union would to have continuous and unreserved support of the subscribing members on the issues raised by the unions for their members. Declining union membership is a clear indication of losing workers’ appeal to trade unions and bargaining power of unions. Declined numbers of subscribing members might give the notion that workers may not feel the need for a union. Thus, it may be immature decision to measure the strength of unions by the count of the numbers of members alone, though the specific size of membership is essential, without knowing the potency of the workers’ desire for union representation.

In Nepal, although trade unions claim to have a good number of members, it is very difficult to show exact number of union members because of the practices of obtaining membership of more than one unions and tendency of frequent change of union memberships among the workers, and lacking of proper membership record and collect membership subscription in trade unions. Similarly, if the claimed memberships of all unions are added it exceeds to the number of employed workforce. Thus, it proves the tendency of the multiple union memberships and poor membership record in Nepal. Overall, Nepalese trade unions are also suffering from the same problems of low membership and low union density.

Trade unions in Nepal have witnessed, during last 10 years, with a decline in their power and influence due to decrease in the number of membership with the reduced number of industrial employment, closure of the most of the enterprises because of the unfavorable economic and unstable political environment caused by the Maoist insurgency. The power of trade unions in most of the enterprises has further been declined as employers have reduced manpower through voluntary retirement scheme, as well as increasing practices of subcontracting. In the days to come, Nepalese trade unions have the opportunities to increase their strength because of the steady growth in industrial employment with the peace keeping process commenced after the grant success of the political revolution organized by the alliance of the seven political parties and Maoists in May 2006.

Political affiliation is a cheap characteristic of Nepalese trade unionism. It is their compulsion of trade union leaders to join political parties and make union affiliated with political parties for power and to gain confidence of workers. Trade unions in Nepal are born, grown and developed in politics. Political parties and management have also supported the political affiliation of unions. Each political party feels status symbol having its own trade union wing. Thus, there are as many trade unions as are the number of major political parties in the country, perhaps more than 15. Management also wants to promote political affiliation of unions by obtaining political support to settle labour problems even after bargaining with inter union leaders. All these supported to increase rivalries among unions, fragmentation of unions, decrease the number of subscribing members and per union membership density and weaken the bargaining power of unions.

The other features of Nepalese trade union belong to outsider leadership, leader-based approach of union management, male-dominated leadership, low confidence of the workers on the unions and their leaders, high involvement of workers in the aggressive industrial actions organised by trade unions, and archival relationship between trade unions and management. All these have raised questions that are trade unions in Nepal relevant, strong and effective to maintain their traditional roles as well as to adapt to the new environment of globalisation of economy?
Extent of members’ participation in union and its activities determine how far the workers are determined and committed towards the solidarity of workers. The extent of activity-wise involvement of members indicates the importance given by them to the union activity. Hence, it becomes necessary to examine what are such factors that attract workers to be a member of a union and put off them from trade union membership. Thus, in a situation of declining trade union membership, investigation on workers’ involvement in trade union activities helps us to take an appropriate policy measure for attracting workers towards unionism.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY
Interest of workers to participate in unions activities indicates the solidarity of workers. Historically, workers were attracted to the union to prevent from exploitation and arbitrary action of management, but when organisation follow progressive HRM policies, these circumstances are by and large unlikely to prevail and thus, workers may not feel the need of a union. Contrary to this, when basic security is threatened, or a sense of arbitrariness is perceived by the employees, the need for the collective action becomes imperative and the union at that time would get support of employees (Dayal, 1997, p. 47).

The desire for unionisation among workers was positively associated with the economic or extrinsic satisfaction and the perception of employees that the company financial performance was better and the greater potential growth of industry (Friedman et al., 2006). However, the study of Freeman and Medoff (1984) and Barling, Fullagar and Kelloway (1992) are different than this proposition. Their studies do not show direct relationship between employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction and employees’ desire to leave a union through the ways of voting in decertification elections. The study of Charlwood (2002) confirms the importance of job dissatisfaction as the predictor of willingness to join a union. Notwithstanding, workers in the developing countries like Nepal have desired to participate in trade union for the protection of their economy and employment security (Adhikari, 2000; Bhangoo, 1989 and Cheema, 1990). It is observed in the study of Das (1985) that poor leadership, fear of victimisation and multiplicity of unions are the major factors causing apathy of workers’ towards trade unions.

Apart from this, the factors like, liking of job, experience and association outside the plant are found related with high-level commitment to unionism in the study of Monga and Monga (1981). In their empirical studies, Sinha (1984), Mukherjee (1985), Arya (1989) and Gani (1992) measured association of job satisfaction with the union membership and found negative relationship. Regarding the political affiliation of trade union, Gani (1991) concluded that the degree of union participation increases with the attachment of workers with political parties. Borgrate (1970) found positive contribution of the political affiliation of trade union to the growth and development of unions. The Study of Charlwood (2002) summarised that workers with left-wing views are most likely to be willing to join a union. However, Singh (1990) in his study found that political affiliation of unions is responsible for damaging the image of unions among workers. The study of Modi (1995) indicated that workers consider trade union as a means to facilitate the redressal of grievances, protect against victimisation and exploitation by management, and secure higher economic benefits to the workers.

In his study Srivastava (2006) put a question to know the responses of trade union leaders regarding the eroding base of union at enterprise level. Souring relations between union and management that cause fear to join union, alienation of workers from unions, politicization of union activities, lacking of seriousness among the trade union leaders about the future of workers, no change of mind of unions according to market realities, lack of communication between
III. OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

In order to take significant strategies towards making trade union relevant and effective to protect the interests of both the workers and the enterprise in the declining trend of union membership in the wake of widespread practices of market economy and globalisation of economy, the study attempts to fulfill the following objectives: (i) To examine the extent of union membership/unionisation; (ii) To identify the factors affecting workers’ desire to join union; (iii) To explore the factors that make workers apathetic towards trade unions; and (iv) To examine association of unionisation with political affiliation and job satisfaction level of the unionised workers.

On the achievement of the objectives, the study was designed on exploratory framework with the following aspects of the research.

The 372 textile workers, who were drawn from the group of 1902 workers engaged in four different large textile factories situated in Eastern, Central and Western Development Region of Nepal, constitutes the sample for the study. The union and non-union members were identified from the sample group for the process of further investigation. The sample factory had 16 enterprise level trade unions affiliated to different political parties. The stratified proportionate-random sampling method was used to select the sample respondents.

The pre-tested interview schedule was used to generate data for the study in the Likert fashion rating scales. The interview schedule, among others, included the following measures.

So as to measure the extent of unionisation, a dichotomous response question-“Are you a member of any trade union?” was first administered to all respondents to find out the number of unionised and non-unionised workers. Then, to identify the extent of union participation among the unionised workers, a Union Participation Index was developed. The index includes 15 such activities of trade union (as given in Table 2) in which the trade union members are supposed to involve. The alternative responses on these activities were: ‘very often’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘seldom’ and ‘never’. The responses were quantified by assigning the weights of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Therefore, the obtained individual weighted-score might be ranged from 15 to 75 scores. The scores was further split into three level of participation as low (falling scores between 15 to 35 scores), moderate (falling between the score of 35 and 55) and high level of participation (falling scores between 55 to 75 scores) to assign workers in the specific category of participation based on the total scores obtained by them.

The job satisfaction scale comprises 20 statements, measuring various facets of job. Based on the total score obtained by the unionised workers, they were classified into high, medium and low levels of job satisfaction. The numbers of unionised workers falling in these categories were 115, 141 and 55 respectively.

Political affiliation of unionised workers was measured through a question, ‘Are you interested in party politics?’ having dichotomous response (i.e. Yes or No). The count of unionised workers who had expressed their attachment with political parties was 235 and independent was 76.

The factors which attract workers to participate in trade union were extracted from the relevant literatures. The responses on these factors were obtained in five point scale, and their relevant importance in weighted scores and ranks.
Apart from the use of weighted score to measure the relevant importance of the factors initiating and discouraging workers to take part in trade union, Z test and Chi-square test were also used to examine the association of the union participation with political attachment and job satisfaction of the workers along with Cramer’s V Coefficient and Contingency Coefficient to clarify the degree of association between these variables.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Union Membership/Unionisation

As a response to the question measuring the number of unionised and non-unionised workers, 311 workers (83.6 per cent of the sample respondents) were found to have membership affiliation with the trade union of their choice. It is an indication of high degree of unionisation (based on membership affiliation) with intense interest towards trade unionism. However, 16.4 per cent of them (61 workers) had shown apathy to trade union membership of a union.

2. Extent of Union Participation

Strength of trade union depends not only on the size of membership but also members’ involvement in union activities. The extent of involvement determines the level of commitment of workers to unionism, industrial way of life and manifests workers’ discontentment with the management and its policies (Gani, 1992). As discussed above, this section of the study aims to measure the extent of union participation through the Union Participation Index. Table 1 shows the umbers of trade union workers falling in the group of high, medium and low categories of participation with their respective numbers of 237, 42 and 32.

Table 1 shows that majority of unionised workers (76.21 per cent) were highly involved in trade union activities as compared to the 13.5 per cent and 10.29 per cent of medium and low level of involvement respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of unionisation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>76.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This finding clearly indicates that workers in the units under study were strongly unionised and committed to the trade union and its activities. The finding is also supported by the significant value of Z test (i.e. $Z= 15.978$, significant at 0.00 level) and the number of the unionised workers. Effectiveness and strength of trade union depend on the degree of workers’ involvement in different activities of union. Table 2 summarises the extent of workers’ involvement in different union activities.

Participation of workers was highest in important protest programs organised by trade union followed by trade union election, talking with friends about union, payment of membership, supporting for trade union by canvassing in trade union election, filing candidature in trade union leadership election, payment of unions dues, attending general meeting of trade union, motivating friends for trade union membership, circulation of communicating materials of union
to workers, perusal of union’s communicating materials, regular visiting to the union office, supporting all activities of trade union, discussion at general meeting and funds collection for trade union, in their ranks.

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Such activity involvement of unionised workers gives a clear picture that unionised workers desired more to participate in those activities which had direct effect on their employment and services and to those activities that were considered as a responsibility of a union member. This finding is very similar to the findings of Arya (1989), Gani (1991) and Modi et al. (1995).

3. Factors Initiating Unionisation

A supplementary question was asked to the unionised workers to identifying the factors initiating them to join in trade union. The reasons expressed by them for joining a trade union are presented in Table 3.

Major factors attracting unionised workers to participate in trade union were to get better financial benefit from the management followed by protection from the unnecessary victimisation of management, showing workers’ unity and solidarity, keeping workers safe from the risk of being isolated from friends, obtain reasonable welfare facilities, getting security in job, obtaining or maintaining better working conditions, complying with the pressure of fellow worker, solving individual grievances, fulfilling customary practice of being trade union member, protecting job during no work period like retrenchment, strike/lock-out and punishment, in their respective ranks.
The least priority was given to the reason for maintaining good labor-management relations indicating that motive of workers to join trade union was not to maintain good labor-management relations but to achieve economic and job security from the support of trade union. However, it also gives us a message that irrespective of worldwide decreasing tendency of union membership, workers still look at the union as an important means for obtaining economic benefits and solidarity among the workers. Thus, we can conclude that economic benefits and protection from job insecurity and fear of victimisation from management bring workers very near to trade unions.

The first four motives shown by the workers in the study are similar to the previous findings by Gani (1991), Arachi (1994) and the finding is partially collated with Modi et al. (1995) but different with the findings of western researchers like Mills (1976) and others.

4. Factors Discouraging Unionisation

An attempt was also made to elicit the causes of apathetic attitude of non-unionised workers towards trade union membership by asking a separate question. As shown the responses in the Table 4, large number of non-unionised workers did not obtain union membership because of low belief on the trade union followed by crisis of confidence in the trade union leadership, fear of victimisation of management, politicisation of trade unions and due to the temporary nature of the job. Other disliking factors were multiplicity of union, feeling of no need of trade union to get benefit because management itself provide such benefits, protest from family member, outsider leadership and disliking of management to union members.

The finding is very similar to the observation of Arachi (1994) and Gani (1991), Adhikari (2000) and Acharya (2001). By this, we can conclude that there are some workers in Nepal they do not still have much confidence on the trade union, union leaders and union activities because of politicisation and outsider leadership in trade unions.

5. Union Participation and Political Affiliation

There is a controversy regarding the political touch of unions. Some study says that political affiliation contributes for the growth and development of trade union (Borgrate, 1970). However,
Singh (1990) says that political affiliation of trade union damages the image of unions among workers. However, Kochan (1980, p.144) says that political beliefs will shape an individual’s views on trade unions. In case of developing countries like Nepal, political support to trade union is required for certain extent, where the workers are little conscious towards their rights. It is also common in Nepal because trade union movement in Nepal has always been moved together with political movement in the country. Therefore, it could be generalised that workers who had some way of attachment with political parties may tend to involve actively in the trade union activities.

The data in Table 5 also states that political affiliation of unionised workers was highest, i.e. more than 75.6 per cent of them were affiliated with this or that political parties based on their political ideology. But, in another aspect, it indicates that workers are divided in different factions promoting rivalries between unions, weakening per union membership density and bargaining power of unions. In an average, there were four unions in each factory under study. Thus, per union membership density in extreme case would be 25 per cent. However, this section of the study attempts to identify whether there is significant association between political attachment of workers and the extent of their participation.

Table 4
Workers’ Reasons for not Joining Union

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Priority (N=61)</th>
<th>Weighted score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Union can do nothing for workers</td>
<td>21 12 7 3 9 189</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders are not confident</td>
<td>7 14 10 - -</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of victimisation</td>
<td>13 5 5 - -</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicisation of trade union activities</td>
<td>8 4 9 -</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary nature of job</td>
<td>10 11 - -</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplicity of unions is very confusing</td>
<td>- 9 6 9 7</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No difficult to get benefit from</td>
<td>2 5 5 8 10 71</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management directly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest from family member</td>
<td>- 4 2 5 11 43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside leadership</td>
<td>- 5 5 - 6 41 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management dislikes the union member</td>
<td>- 3 6 8 32 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Rank is based on weighted score. Weights of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 have been assigned to first to fifth ranks respectively.

Table 5
Association between Union Participation and Political Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political attachment</th>
<th>Extent of union participation (N=311)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20 (8.51)</td>
<td>20 (8.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12 (15.79)</td>
<td>22 (28.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32 (10.29)</td>
<td>42 (13.92)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $x^2 = 26.5062; P < 0.01; df = 2; Cramer’s Value = 0.29; Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.
6. Union Participation and Job Satisfaction

It is common to say that satisfied workers desire less to involve in trade union to obtain benefits from management through the help of the union. The data in Table 6 also affirms this proposition. The significant Chi-square value verifies the moderate association between level of job satisfaction and extent of union participation. The finding is in agreement with the finding of Arya (1989); Gani (1992) and Charlwood (2002).

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In spite of the declining trend of trade union membership in the world, extent of unionisation among the textile workers under this study was highest. Contrary to this, we came also to conclude that per union membership density is very thin because of the division of workers in different faction of trade unions based on political ideology, which made workers disunite and weak to bargain for their demands. Activity wise involvement of workers in trade union indicates that workers are interested to involve in those activities which bring direct and converted immediate result. Prospect of economic and material benefits, protection from the victimisation of management, solidarity and closeness and job security are other major factors appealing workers to join trade union. Similarly, job dissatisfaction and political consciousness of the workers attract workers to depend on union to fulfill their demands.

Low confidence on trade unions and their leaders, fear of victimisation from management, political nature of unions, temporary nature of the job, multiplicity of unions and disliking of management to the union members along with the satisfaction from the job and low interest of workers in politics are the common set of factors that create unwillingness among workers to join trade union.

The practical implication of present findings of the study is important to the actors of industrial relations. Strong trade union is not only required for the justifiable distribution of the reward of labour among the workers but also to improve the performance of the organization and industrial peace in the country. In order to become powerful agent, trade unions should respond the present challenges positively by modifying their old strategies of gathering workers. Trade unions are required to maintain the membership of trade union or attract new members by serving as an agent for fulfilling economic and material benefits and job security requirement of the workers and making efforts to improve the factors in which workers have expressed discontent with the union. Union should not forget that unions which work for benefit of workers would have more members. So the union leaders should devote most of their time in solving problem of workers and try to obtain and maintain the confidence of workers. Trade unions are required to avoid politicisation and multiplicity of trade unions among other factors that
discourage workers to join union. In order to enhance numerical strength, trade unions should work for the concept of one union in one factory, organise the unorganised workers including the workers in the informal sector, women and contingent workers, maintain good and regular rapport with workers and management, and increase the productivity, growth and development of both workers and internal leadership.

Similarly, management should not perceive trade union as an archrival of management but also a partner of improving organisational performance. Thus, management is required to best serve to satisfy the interests of workers, discourage outsourcing, keep workers informed about the limitations of the enterprise and keep the workers free from any kind of threat, discrimination and victimisation, especially upon the unionised workers.

Governments, on other hand, should discourage the closure of enterprise and retrenchment of the workforce in the name of low production, shortage of materials and power, industrial and political unrest and other like issues, by formulating appropriate laws and taking progressive measures of policies and programmes. It should promote the collective bargaining process for the redressal of grievances and labour problem rather than to third party involvement.

References

Borgrate, M.V .D. (1970), Trade unionism in Indian Ports, Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations, New Delhi.


GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

1. Contribution should be submitted in duplicate, the first two impressions of the typescript. It should be typed on a quarter or foolscap sized paper, in double-space and with at least one and a half inch margin on the right. Two copies of a computer printout along with a floppy diskette are preferred. They should subscribe strictly to the Journal format and style requirements.

2. The cover page of the typescript should contain: (i) title of the article, (ii) name(s) of author(s), (Hi) professional affiliation, (iv) an abstract of the paper in less than 150 words, and (v) acknowledgements, if any. The first page of the article must also provide the title, but not the rest of the item of cover page.

3. Though there is no standard length for articles, a limit of 30 typed pages including tables, appendices, graphs, etc., would be appreciated.

4. Tables should preferably be of such size that they can be composed within one page area of the Journal containing about 45 lines, each of about 85 characters (letter/digits). The source(s) should be given below each table containing data from secondary source(s) or results from previous studies.

5. Figures and charts, if any, should be professionally drawn using such materials (like black ink on transparent papers) which allow reproduction by photographic process. Considering the prohibitive costs of such process, figures and charts should be used only when they are most essential.

6. Indication of notes should be serially numbered in the text of the articles with a raised numeral and the corresponding notes should be given at the end of the paper.

7. A reference list should appear after the list of notes. It should contain all the articles, books, reports, etc., referred in the text and they should be arranged alphabetically by the names of authors or institutions associated with those works.

(a) Reference to books should present the following details in the same order: author’s surname and name (or initials), year of publication (within brackets), title of the book (underlined/italic), place of publication. For example:
   Giri, V.V. (1958), Labour Problems in Indian Industries, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

(b) Reference to institutional publications where no specific author(s) is (are) mentioned should present the following details in the same order: institution’s name, year of publication (within brackets), title of the publication (underlined/italic), place of publication. For example:

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(d) Reference in the text or in the notes should simply give the name of the author or institution and the year of publication, the latter within brackets; e.g. Roy (1982). Page numbers too may be given wherever necessary, e.g. Roy (1982, pp. 8-15).