

# Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations in Indian Organizations: A Scientific Exploration

Dr. S. C. Das

Professor of OB & HR  
Faculty of Commerce, B.H.U

Shloka Singh

Research Scholar  
Faculty of Commerce, B.H.U

## Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this paper is to offer a broad view toward trade union and industrial relations and in specific to banking sector in the country.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The paper stands on a study of relevant literature of industrial relations and trade union records from the period 1921 to 2020.

**Findings:** This paper supports the available literature and discloses the qualitative nature of trade unions and industrial relations in India. Additionally, it also establishes the relation between the former two constructs.

**Originality/value:** The paper is written with unique insight; the paper has a unique blend of national and international literature, which makes the paper understandable on both national and international front.

**Keywords:** Employee, Employers, Employee relations, Industrial relations, Trade unions, Public sector Banks, workers

Paper type: Review Article

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## Introduction

Trade union is the united voice and power of the workers which they inculcate in the work and organisation/industry they are (Jagannathan & Roy 2009). Trade union is the line that exists between the employers and the employees that tend to protect the employees. The trade union was the necessity which took birth among the employers in order to provide them with an umbrella of protection. A chief element of an industrial relation is trade union (Ghosh et. al. 2009). The various laws introduced by central government and implemented by state government can be the parts for the exiting industrial relations in the country (Singh & Kulkarni, 2013). Amid all laws, industrial relations are largely shaped by Trade Union Act 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing orders) Act 1946 and the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947 (Gupta & Seth, 2000). Trade union offer a broad view i.e., it involves many organisations with their respective assurances toward their employees (Lysson & Ongori, 2011). The origin of trade union can be drawn from the industrial revolution. The desolate circumstances widespread at work and home at the time have been brought in various writings. (Cole, 1962). There are various phases of industrial relations

which are influenced by political, social and economic factors. The process of recruitment and disposing of workers depend on the principal of demand and supply (Monappa, 2012). Industrial relation is the effect of all the micro and macro factors which makes the collaboration easy between the employer and the employee (Vennila & Narendrarathnaraj, 2018). Trade unions, which work as a recognised and necessary association has empowered many workers in past and still continues to do so. A trade union can be basically defined as an association for supporting the workers. (Shrestha B.R, 2012). A small discussion group was the first form of trade union which later shaped into a certified organisation for various functions, as negotiating for better functioning hours, pay and working surroundings (Ananaba, 1979; Allen, 1960 and Glennis, 2005). The difference between the dominant employer and helpless employee gave rise to the workers movement (Fraser, 1999). (Koodamara N.K., 2016) discusses about how everything changed after amendment of liberalization, globalisation and privatization. The minor interference of state resulted in providing more potency to capital class influencing trade union the most. The capitalist started to demand for a labour reform, the absence of which emerged as unfair labour practises, apart from this it also reduced the numbers of workers and increased contract workers more than regular. A strong and stable union is required in an organisation for better industrial relation (Rajesh. S. & M.K.S, 2014). The political sway over trade union also persuade the objectives (Ratnam, 2006). The many functions of trade union include representing workers in various fora, improving working conditions and living conditions (Freeman & Medoff, 1984) Fair wages (Madheswaran and Shanmugam, 2003). The significant weapon that strengthens the will amongst the trade union members is "collective bargaining (Chilala, 2015).

### **Objectives and Methodology of the Study**

The study conducted is combined of secondary facts. The author cautiously studied the existing secondary sources according to their objectives. The sources were collected from books, journals and blogs and were interpreted accordingly in order to make the study useful to the readers. The study hence leads us toward enlightening our knowledge for the following cases:

To comprehend the role of trade union in Indian organization.

To discern the prominence and phases of industrial relation.

To examine the relationship between trade union and industrial relation.

### **II. Structure of Trade Unions in India**

In this modern era every industry or organisations have its own set of objectives to comprehend and laws to track. Trade unions are workers association to protect these laws for workers i.e. Safety, security and interests (Dankert, 1948). The formation and registration of trade unions is granted by The Trade Union Act, 1926 (TU Act). According to the TU Act trade union is defined as 2(h) "Trade Union" means any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workmen and employers or between workmen and workmen, or between employers and employers, or for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business, and includes any federation of two or more Trade Unions:

Provided that this Act shall not affect –

any agreement between partners as to their own business;

any agreement between an employer and those employed by him as to such employment; or

any agreement in consideration of the sale of the good-will of a business or of instruction in any profession, trade or handicraft.

The Ministry of labour recognize twelve central trade union organizations (CTUO) (Desai, 2015)

**Table 1: Central Trade Unions in India**

S. No	Name Of Trade Union	Political Affiliation	Year of Establishment
1.	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)	Bharatiya Janata Party	1955
2.	Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)	Indian National Congress	1947
3.	All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)	Communist Party of India	1920
4.	Hind Mazdoor Sabha	None. Independent Socialist Organization	1948
5.	Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	1970
6.	Trade Unions Co -Ordination Centre (TUCC)	All India Forward Bloc Political Party	1970
7.	Self- Employed Women's Association (SEWA)	None. Independent	1972
8.	Labour Progressive Front (LPF)	DravidaMunnetraKazhagam Political Party	1969
9.	All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation Group	1989
10.	Indian National Trinamool Trade Union Congress (INTTUC)	All India Trinamool Congress Political Party	1947
11.	United Trade Union Congress (Lenin Sarani) (UTUC (LS))	Socialist Unity Center of India Political Party	-----
12.	United Trade Union Congress (UTUC)	Revolutionary Socialist Political Party	-----

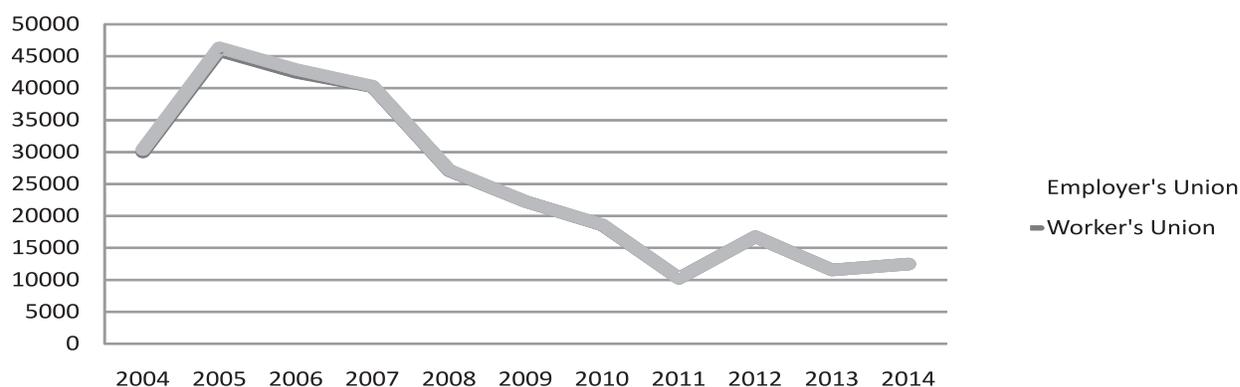
*Source: Compiled by author from various sources.*

### III (A) Trade Union Density in India

Union density plays the role of a synonym for union strength. The impact of unions can be analysed using union density as an instrument (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1999). The bargaining authority of a union can be highlighted via density it also works as an alternative power of employees (Fitzenberger, Kohn, & Lembcke 2013). Encouraging policies could be invited, applied and carried on due to high membership and density (Rose & Chaison, 1996). However, a high-density union can positively relate with disputes in an organisation and vice-versa, it strengthens the voice of employers resulting in one-sided decisions by management (Rai, 2004). There are various economic factors that affect union density among which inflation and unemployment plays a major role. Where unemployment works unfavourably with the union density and inflation apply favourably with union density (Blaschke, 2000). In the present era globalisation can diminish the labour density as it calls international completion which effect the

union density negatively (Scruggs & Lange, 2002).

The union density of India is comparatively lower than other developing countries putting the existence of union at stake. The union density can be noted at 3% fall since the year 1993-94. The major reason which could be stated for the fall is increase in the number of employees in uncovered sector; the government steps to privatise the public sector can also be identified as a cause for the same (Shah, 2018). The economic structure of the country has gained more uncovered cohorts reinstating the covered cohorts since globalisation, which does not resort to union membership (Jokivuori, 2006). The graph below (Fig.I) depicts the union density of unions in our country in two distinct groups i.e. workers and employers' unions. The graph covers a decade of the registered trade unions in the country.

**Fig.: I Registered trade unions during the period 2004-2014**

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### III (B): Trade Union in Banks

Trade union is defined as the group of momentary or long-term workers with an objective to promote, protect and equalise the requisites and environment in any organisations (Ikpefan, 2003). Trade union in the country is not only confined to workers of industrial genre, but it also pays its attentions towards those workers working in financial institutions (like banks and insurance companies), Railways, IT sectors and other such organisations (Kanhere, 1986). The public sector displays different view of trade unions with a bit same in all i.e. very trade union is associated with a central trade union (Roy Chowdhury, 2003). The end of 18th century witnessed the

origination of banks in India (Gajdhane, 2012), Financial institutions that provide financial facilities to its customer were known as Bank (Khanna, & Kaushal 2013). The traditional practices of management in banks are old due to various precedent factors. Large industrial houses-controlled banking system earlier than nationalization. The employees who worked there mostly belonged to the middle class. The autocracy in management was observed and the conditions in which the employee worked was in the same hands (Bankers, 2017). The different trade union in banks are as follows.

**Table:2- Trade Unions Solely Associated with Banks**

S. L. No	Name Of Unions	Establishment
1.	All India Bank Officers Confederations (AIBOC)	1985
2.	All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA)	1946
3.	National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE)	1970
4.	Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI).	1982
5.	All India Bank Officers' Association	1979
6.	Indian National Bank Employees' Federation (INBEF)	1973
7.	National Organisation of Bank Workers (NOBW)	1965
8.	All India Bank of Baroda Officers' Association (AIBOBOA)	1964
9.	National Organisations of Bank Officers	----

*Source: Compiled by author from various sources.*

**Reason for Existence of Trade Unions**

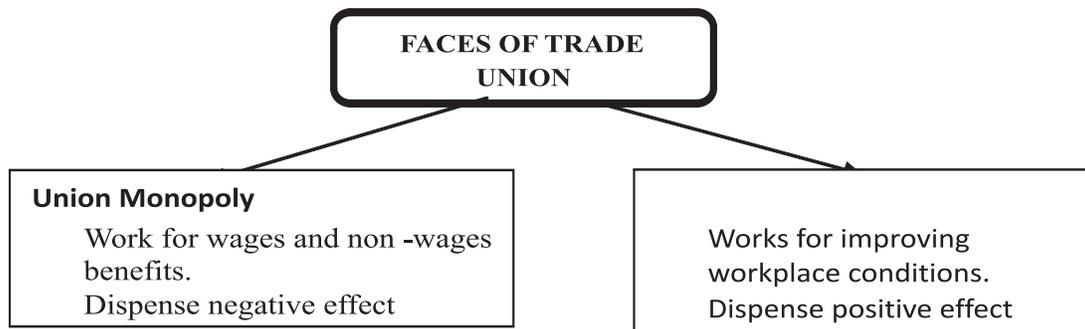
The system that provides strength to the workers is known as trade union. An organisation that slack the associations of workers can be either very stern or very refined, in both ways the work being carried out in an organisation can never be right (Thomas, 2005). The supporting philosophy plays a major role in casting the roles played by the members of the union (Ratnam, 2006). The first and foremost task of any union is to protect and promote the interest of workers (Perlman, 1928; Hoxie, 1921), the needs and safety of workers in any organisations should be the priority for unions (Freeman & Me doff, 1984) and to protect workers from any decimations or unjust and to help workers in maintaining their interest (Rao 2010).

**According to Ewing(2005) trade union perform these functions:**

- Service functions, for the members;
- Regulatory functions, for the rules implied;
- Representative functions, for representing employee's interest at workplace;
- Government functions and public administrative functions, for ranging with government in order to maintain legislations for performing other functions.

Freeman and Medoff, (1984) identified two faces of trade unions which are present in an organization/industry to explore the role of trade unions,

**FigureII: Faces of trade union**



**Scenario of Industrial Relations in India**

The model of development was changed when in 90's the economic reform initiated the adoption of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. (Koodamara, 2016). The four phases of industrial relations enumerate the pros and cons. Different time has a different effect on the economic activity resulting in generation of distinct power and significance (Jessop, 1994).

**The First Phase**

**(1950 – Mid 1960s)**

The union movement covers the period of 'National Capitalism' and first three five-year plans i.e. “1951–56, 1956–61, and 1961–66”. An emergence of public enterprise could be seen in capital and intermediate goods sectors, Industrial products and manufacturing output increased as well (Nayyar, 1981). The organised sector saw an increase in public sector (Papola, 1994) the employment growth also peaked (Venkataratnam, 1996), which resulted as formation of public sector unions. This phase saw the

growth of two unions All India Trade Union Congress (henceforth, AITUC) and d Indian National Trade Union Congress (henceforth, INTUC) with their own set of rules (Chatterjee, 1980). Chaudhuri (1996:12) said the emergence of Industrial Disputes Act of Unions-1947 as a significant law between the employers and the workers. The provisions obstructed collective bargaining during this phase. The Trade Union Act 1926 came by with the lack of provision for recognition. The labour commissioner conciliated the dispute, if unsolved was referred to an industrial or labour court, or was occasionally done through binding arbitration (Kennedy, 1966).

**The Second Phase**

**(Mid 1960 –1979)**

The second phase acted with the annual plan (1967-69) fourth (1969–74) and fifth (1974–79) plan. This phase was associated with the closure of all industrial activities (Nayyar, 1981). The union activities, collective bargaining practices, and labour markets were affected due to the change in the economy. This phase saw practises of strikes,

lockouts and disputes (Sengupta, 1992). The disputes involving multiple unions increased in the former part of the second phase when compared with the first phase, which gave birth to many union enmity (Bhattacharjee, 1987a: 57). Industrial relations saw two measures for its cure, the first one to encourage the bipartite approach to industrial relation by setting up a National Apex Body consisting of twelve union federations and eleven employer representatives (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987). The second measure arose due to the pressure from union which was the “1976 amendment to the ID Act” (Sengupta, 1992)

### **The Third Phase**

#### **(1980–1991)**

This phase reviews the Sixth (1980–85) and the Seventh (1985–90) Five Year Plans including two Annual Plans (1990–92) (Papola, 1994). The microeconomics alterations have had a deep influence on the political nature of the trade union, labour market and on industrial relation structure. This phase evoked huge strikes from the end of public sectors (Bhattacharjee, 1999). With the end of huge textile strike the union went down like it could never resurrect again (Bhattacharjee, 1988), until the formation of KamgarAghadi Party by Datta Samant which was considered as the new union movement in India. The main ingredient in this phase was the ascend of various independent unions which were competing against tradition affiliated unions (Pendse, 1981).

### **The Fourth Phase**

#### **(1992–2000)**

This fourth phase go on board with the Eighth (1992–97) and the Ninth (1997–2002) Five Year Plans. The post reforms did not bring a very fruitful result for the labour union. The union membership for non-agricultural and labours declined (Bhattacharjee, 2001). An industrial relation commission without government influence which could provide recognition to the unions and solve the disputes was the only hope (Sengupta & Sett 2000) The need for tripartite consultation was felt to resolve various labour issues it was during this phase when the citizens acknowledged the meaning of union was to represent the section of the people who were declined. The second NLC was established by the government. The focus in this phase shifted a little to the workers in the unorganised sector (Venkataratnam, 2000).

### **Influences of Trade Union on Industrial Relations**

Democracy is a prime need for any organisation to work. Trade union or labour association is the group of workers

working together to protect their own rights and interests. A trade union is an ongoing guild of wage-earners in order to maintain or improve the conditions of their working lives. Trade union is a group of workers where all the necessary steps are taken in regard to their safety, security and hygiene, throughout the globe there are various federations/associations working for the employees. The union plays an important role in the creation of pleasant environment at the workplace (Quain, 2019). In industrial relations the display of the interest of the workers is carried out by the trade union. The uplift of workers with many advantages in various organisations can be observed due to advices of unions (Wolfe, 2005). However, according to (Pitan, 2013) the various functions of trade unions in industrial relations are:

It performs as a negotiator on behalf of affiliated unions.

It displays the unity of trade union and industrial relations.

It objectifies to work together for the blend of the unions with the same aim.

It educates the members with legal advices and available opportunities.

Framework for co-coordinating the activities of trade unions

Government consultations on matters that affect industrial relations – wage agreements, etc.

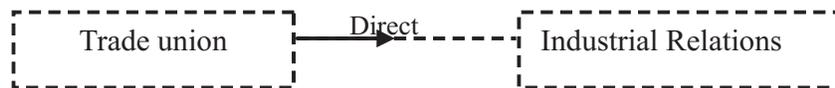
In the common language that institution that manages cash and records transactions are termed as bank (Khanna, & Kaushal 2013). In the modern era the methods adopted by white-collar union are same as that of blue-collar unions to protect their rights or for attention of the system toward certain hindrance (Hoque & Masoom 2018). The trade unions existing in banks connect the employees with prevailing laws meant for the protection of their interests and safety. There are various reasons for joining trade unions; they can be to acquire collective power, to represent unity, to have a better working condition and to have safety and security. Many authors like Perlman (1928), Bain and Clegg (1974) and Hyman (1975) have described trade union as a super weapon of employees in their works, and they have often talked about the perks that the workers received. Lowe (1981) has analysed various key points on why bank employee join unions in general, they are-employee powerlessness, bureaucracy roles, interpersonal factors and reluctance of management against toward collective bargaining. Punekar, (1971) in a special article has talked about “common interest” as an activity which was neglected by the members of white-collar unions and concludes agitation and litigations the two methods of white-collar unions. Industrial relations

stresses on different factors like employee relations, working environment/condition, working culture in any industry or organisation. Employee relations at a workplace fortify the relation between an individual/group with the employer or with one another(Katz et al., 1985). Millward et al., (2000)found out collective bargaining as the most powerful weapon amid all other ways of bargaining.

There are various factors that have brought trade union at the cusp of end.Farris, (2006) pointed out the non-at tentativeness toward trade union at present day. Factors like technology up gradation(Jensen, 2003), increasing MNC's (Saddler 2000),fluctuations in the policies of

government (Guerin et al 2004).Decline in unions can be seen in the last few years, some might have declined due to low strength and some of the unions which survived may be strong(Millward et al., 2002).Though measures can be taken to re-shape the unions like, recognition of union by the employers in support of their work, adhering towards unionism and many such actions that can make a union active. The above literature postulates the following framework.

**Figure III Framework describing the relationship between trade union and industrial relation**

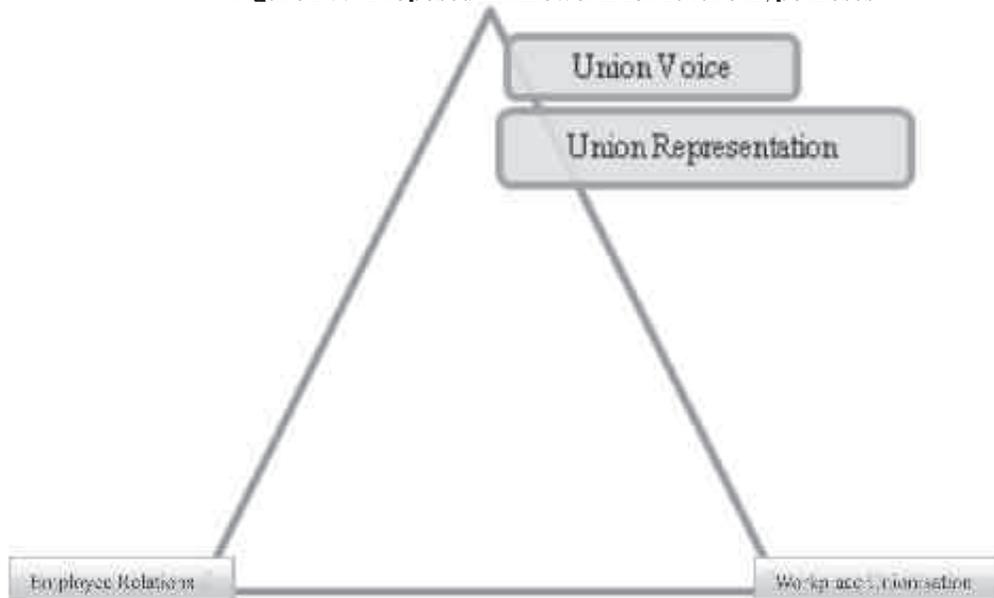


**Future Research Attempts with Hypotheses**

Trade union has changed a lot since past years and it will continue to change for the upcoming modifications. Trade union does not only work in the favour of the employee but also work for the organisation as a whole.Gall (1997) talked about several key points like electronic banking, electronic money, mergers of banks for the future researchers to test and acknowledge whether these can have a positive or negative impact on the commitment towards unions. Apart from this Gall,(1997) have also

raised questions for the future researchers, why will an individual join union? Why individual actions often convert to collective action at workplace? And which factors prohibits an individual to from uniting with union. The proposed diagrams can help the future researchers to generalise the trade union and employee relations in different sense. The researchers must also keep in mind that the stream of the effect can be positive as well as negative in respect to different workplace or countries.

**Figure IV: Proposed framework for future hypotheses**



## Hypotheses

H1 Employee relations are positively related to workplace unionisation.

H2 Employee relations are positively related to union voice.

H3 Employee relations are positively related to union representation.

H4 Union voice mediates the relationship between employee relations and workplace unionisation.

H5 Union representative mediate the relationship between employee relations and workplace unionisation

## Conclusion

The study is built upon extensive analysis from various national and international papers related to financial organisations, white-collar unions, trade unions etc. The paper discusses the bond between the trade unions and the employees. It also focuses on the post-independence scenario of industrial relations and trade union in the country. The paper mostly emphasises on the work that has been by the unions for the people working in the financial institution. The international literature reveals that the struggle in uplifting the employees around the world is same. In the developing country like, India, the unions are losing their grip since the economy is moving towards privatisation of various public entities. The study describes different factors which are making the trade union weak/strong. Banking sector has suffered from the very beginning; the unions were strong then when compared to present day scenario. There are still various measures which by taken by the employees in order to create a strong union not only in financial sector but also in different sectors. Trade union enunciate a favourable relation with IR strengthening the voice, loyalty and membership of the workers. However, different factor like mergers, technological changes, contractual employment, recession etc has certainly made the financial sector weak. The hypotheses can be generalised using different factors. As the work done in this area are limited and the researchers can contribute more by carrying future research on this topic.

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