

Participation of Women in Trade Unions: A Study of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)

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Women have gained status in contemporary society and organizations, yet they account for a small fraction of the trade union membership and positions of power in union structure. This paper examines the participation of women in one of the major central trade unions of the country, namely CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions). It studies the reasons for low participation of women in unions in 25 states and the efforts made by CITU to increase women membership. Results indicate that patriarchy in unions, attitude of union members towards women workers, organizational power and politics, conflicting domestic and workplace responsibilities and feeling of self-efficacy were the main barriers to women occupying key positions in union offices.

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Introduction

According to Sue Ledwith (2012), the story of the persistence of women's subordinate position in trade unions is one that is continuously being told. This is true of most of the developing countries. In India also women participation in trade unions is not as per their proportions in labor force. In spite of the efforts made by several central trade unions, women participation is very low. This paper unravels the status of women membership and participation in CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions), a central trade union organization and their efforts to increase their participation level.

Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU) was established under the philosophy of Karl Marx and is affiliated to Communist Party of India (Marxist). It is one of the most important central trade union organizations, which put in significant efforts for involvement of women in unions. It was established in the year 1970 with no woman in their organization. Since then the percentage has increased from zero to 31.9 in the year 2011. The overall membership of CITU is 5796033 from 4487 unions and among them

women membership is 1850892 in 2011 after which no verification was done till date.

CITU's efforts are not only towards increasing their membership but to place them in leadership positions also. The structure of CITU consists of: (i) Affiliated unions, (ii) The delegates assembled at the triennial or special session of the CITU conference, (iii) The general council, (iv) The working committee and (v) The state conference, the state committee and the state council.

Approximately 40 years back CITU started work among working women. Since then it has been continuously pursuing its efforts to mainstream more and more women into the trade union movement including into the leadership positions. These efforts are today reflected in the increased participation of women in the trade union movement. Now women's 'wings', 'departments' or 'committees' exist in most of the central trade unions.

Significantly several middle class women employees are now not only active in their own trade unions but also playing active roles in CITU. In some states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, several women employees in banks, insurance, state and central governments are functioning as conveners and members of the district and state level coordination committees of working CITU women; some have been elected to the CITU district and state committees too. In some states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Tamil

Nadu, etc they have been participating in the campaigns, rallies, processions etc taken up by the state coordination committees on issues like sexual harassment, equal wages etc and on the occasion of the International Women's Day. They have been the major subscribers to the CITU's monthly journal in English 'The Voice of the Working Woman'.

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Review of Literature

Trade unions are an important component in a democratic society, but they did not serve women well. Trade unions in India should accept that large numbers of women have to work if they and their families are to survive. However, women are also expected to take responsibilities for running the home and raising the children. Participation in trade unions should not be seen as a burden rather it should be understood as a remedy for helping the women take on dual responsibilities properly by addressing and solving women's issues in an industrial setting. The unions should show the signs of tackling gender inequalities and should be seen as human rights advocates and real

change agents for encouraging women's participation in Indian trade unions (Venkatratnam, 2002).

There are various reasons of low participation of women in unions. First and foremost is that the percentage of women joining the organized sector is very low and that the number joining the trade union is even worse. For more participation of women in trade unions, percentage of women joining the organized sector must be improved. One of the reasons for low participation of women in organized sector is dropout of the females after secondary school and before graduation. There are some industries with low career opportunities and low pay scales where females are more employed than the males (Jain & Ratnam, 2002).

Joshi (2007) points out that discrimination against women in the form of job segregation in workplaces is another factor contributing to lower participation of women in union activities. Research in India on the gendered division of labor and the relationship between production and reproduction has demonstrated the asymmetrical structural relationship between male and female workers. Fernandes (1998) observed, while gender inequalities are linked to hegemonic cultural norms, they are also structurally based identities that both are shaped and produced by socio economic processes, (Banerjee, 1991; Sangari, 1993)

In several programs organized by the ILO and international trade union organizations like ICFTU, WFTU, ITSS, usually the sponsors ask for gender equality

in nominations, still very rarely, if ever, Indian trade unions are known to send women members/ leaders for participation in national events (Venkaratnam, 2002). And so it is extremely important to know reasons for low participation. According to Ledwith (2012), the enduring hegemonic masculine culture of trade unions continues to outweigh the extensive gender and diversity structural work developed in recent decades. Trade unions are no different from other organizations.

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In spite of knowing about low participation of women in Indian trade unions, the contribution of a few women leaders cannot be ignored. Hind Majdoor Sabha, (HMS) which is not affiliated to any political party, was led by women: Kamla Sinha & Maniben Kara. Kamla Sinha became the first and the only woman to have become minister for external affairs in the union cabinet in the late 1990s. Martens and Mitter (1994) observed that India is pioneer in organizing the informal sector. Radhakrishna and Sharma (1998) noted a varied pattern of organization of trade unions, workers' cooperatives and self help groups on specific issues. In this context Ela Bhat is a major contributor. Bhat (1997) reports on the organization she founded and nurtured, SEWA (Self Employed Women Association) for the poor women in the

informal sector. Her work is an inspiration for others. SEWA is reckoned as one of the outstanding examples not only in India but throughout the world. Like SEWA, Jaya Arunachalam has organized self-employed and unorganized sector women in four southern states under the name WWF (Working Women Forum). Selliah (1989) and Bangasser (1994) documented SEWA and WWF in organizing women workers in informal sector. Bangassar (1994) appreciated WWF in fostering and nurturing a culture of leadership from below (Chambers, 1986,) participative and non-hierarchical, where members know that, their wisdom being recognized, they have direct access to decision making.

There is serious dearth of unions and associations in the organized sector where women are more participative in general and at leadership positions in particular. According to a survey of over 200 collective agreements signed by nearly 1800 trade union leaders revealed that less than five out of the 1800 were women trade union leaders who formally

participated in collective bargaining and were signatories to the collective agreements. Another survey of social dialogue in the public sector in India revealed that despite the joint consultation machinery instituted by the Govt. of India in the late 1960s, not once has a single woman represented from the staff side.

Research Method

As far as primary data is concerned, in-depth and focused group interviews were conducted with women trade unionist of CITU. Purposive sampling technique was used and sample size was 55. All the interviews were recorded and converted in to transcripts for further analysis. Content analysis was used to examine the qualitative data. Secondary data was from reports and documents of CITU gathered from the office of CITU, New Delhi. Information available on website of CITU was also explored and used in the paper. Monthly journal of CITU named 'Voice of Working Women' was also taken into consideration for secondary data.

Table 1 Details of In-depth Interviews (both Individual and Focused Group) with Women Unionists

Method	Women Unionists	Total
Individual Interview	25	25
Focused Group Interview	5*6 (five interviews of six members each)	30
Total	55	55

Descriptive Analysis

Women membership in CITU registered an increase of 44.63% between its 13th and 14th conferences. While it was 25.43% in 2008, it was around 32% in

2011. Of the total increase in the membership of CITU during this period 83% was of women members. In 3 states, Himachal Pradesh (53.2%), Assam (50.9%) and Maharashtra (50.5%), women comprised more than half of the

total membership. In 11 states, including Karnataka (48.6%), Madhya Pradesh (42.8%), Gujarat (40.7%), Tripura (38.7%), Bihar (35.9%), Odisha (35.9%), Kerala (35 %) and Haryana (34%) women membership is more than the national average. In Andhra Pradesh (31.2%) and Punjab (30.1%) it is marginally lower than the national average. In 4 states, Uttarakhand (29.8%), Tamil Nadu (28.2%), Jharkhand (27.7%) and West Bengal (25 %) women membership is more than 25% of the CITU membership in the state. Women membership was less than 10% in four states – Rajasthan (6.58%), A&N Islands (5.3%), Uttar Pradesh (3.15%) and Goa (0.7%). In three states it is between 10% and 20% - Chattisgarh (16.3%), Delhi (11.2%) and J&K (10.8%) (Annexure 1)

The sustained work of CITU among the scheme workers – Anganwadi employees, ASHAs, mid-day meal workers in addition to its continued activities among some sections of home based workers like the beedi workers, garment workers etc and in the traditional sectors like the coir, cashew, plantation workers etc is reflected in this increase in women membership of CITU. In almost all the states, even in some of the states where women membership of CITU is comparatively less, women often constitute around half of the mobilization of CITU on the occasions of its campaigns, struggles and conferences at the district as well as at the state levels. Participation of women workers in the day to day activities of CITU has also increased to some extent. There is considerable improvement in the presence of women

delegates in CITU conferences at different levels. However, resistance continues, particularly in some of the stronger states like Kerala, West Bengal etc. for electing women as delegates to the conferences and to the decision making bodies of CITU. Women delegates comprised only 16% of the total delegates to the 14th conference of CITU despite clear guidelines that women's contingent in the state delegations should be commensurate with their membership in CITU in the state and in any case not less than 20%. Some state committees like Andhra Pradesh elected women as per their proportion in their state membership (Annexure 3). Some state committees in the 'Hindi speaking' region too, where CITU is organizationally weak, made commendable efforts. But conscious and effective measures were not taken by some of the stronger committees of CITU.

In no state conference was women's participation commensurate with their membership.

In the state conferences preceding the 14th conference of CITU, women delegates constituted more than 20% only in 9 states with the highest being in Assam (37.35%) (Annexure 2). In no state conference was women's participation commensurate with their membership. In most of the states, the proportion of women in state conferences was approximately half of their membership, except in Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand where it was only slightly less than their share in membership. In West Bengal and

Kerala, it was less than half their membership; in Kerala it was only slightly more than one third.

Several unions with only women members like anganwadi employees, ASHAs etc or overwhelming majority of women employees are even today led by male leaders in some states. This might be necessary in the initial stages of starting the organization. But even after long periods, and even when capable women leaders are available, male leaders continue as presidents/ general secretaries etc in some states. They then get elected as delegates to the CITU conferences. This practice needs to be stopped. Women activists must be trained, developed and elected to leading positions, particularly in unions where all members or overwhelming majority of them are women.

The presence of women as office bearers and members of the CITU committees at all levels has increased but it still does not adequately reflect either their membership the role they play in its activities. Seven women were elected as office bearers (out of the total 35) in the 13th conference of CITU, including as its treasurer. This has gone up to 8 (22.8%) in the 14th conference of CITU. At the state level, women office bearers constitute 22.86% of the total office bearers in Karnataka and Maharashtra, 18.52% in Andhra Pradesh and 15.79% in Assam(Annexure 3). But the situation at the level of the general council/ working committee of CITU continues to be grim. In the CITU general council elected in the 14th conference of CITU women

formed 13.26% while in the working committee their share was a mere 11.87% (Annexure 4).

In 5 states – Andhra Pradesh (27.73%), Assam (23.53%), Himachal Pradesh (23.72%), Karnataka (26.64%) and Maharashtra (25.64%), -women constituted more than 20% of the state committee members (Annexure 3). In 7 states- Chattisgarh (8.89%), Delhi (6.98%), Jharkhand (7.94%), Kerala (7.64%), Rajasthan (5.36%), Uttar Pradesh (4.08%) and West Bengal (9.04%) - women formed less than 10% of the total state committee members. In Andhra Pradesh, mandal level committees of CITU have been formed in more than 1100 out of the total 1120 mandals in the state(Annexure 3). Women, most of them anganwadi workers, have been elected as presidents/ general secretaries of more than half of these mandal committees (Annexure 3).

These details clearly show that in general, the reluctance to elect women to leadership positions still continues, particularly in the stronger state committees. This, despite the remarkable increase in women's participation in trade union activities as witnessed in their joining the unions in large numbers as members, their contribution to CITU mobilizations and struggles often facing the police and victimization on par with men.

There is some improvement in the efforts to train and develop working women cadres, at the union and CITU levels. In many states the anganwadi employees' unions have been organizing

trade union classes at the state and lower levels that helped in the development of internal cadres for the unions. Some of these cadres have been helping in the organization of other unions, particularly of ASHAs, mid-day meal workers etc. in some states thus contributing to the increase in women members in CITU. Some state committees of CITU have also been organizing separate trade union classes for working women of 1-5 days' duration. In Andhra Pradesh, regular study circles for women cadres are being organized in some districts.

There has been slight increase in the number of women recruited as full time cadres of CITU but only in a very few states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. More than 50 women full timers of CITU are working in Andhra Pradesh. In Tamil Nadu, 9 women full timers and 66 part time allowance workers in 17 districts have been identified.

However, conscious efforts to develop working women cadres and deploy them to strengthen work among working women are not regularly made and even where some efforts are made they are highly inadequate. More efforts are necessary in all states to identify, train, educate and develop working women cadres and entrust them with more responsibilities in CITU and its affiliated unions.

Findings

Approximately 95% of women work in the unorganized sector and so most of the labor laws are not applicable to them.

They do not get even minimum wages and other social security benefits. Due to patriarchy, wages are not equal amongst men and women for the same work. According to the data provided by the Labor Bureau in April 2013, the gap between the wages of men and women in some activities has widened in the last decade. Women face sexual harassment/assault in the organization as well in the union but because of the fear of losing their jobs, they don't discuss their issues. Issues like maternity benefit, night shift work crèche facility and availability of washrooms for women are also matters of concern for working women.

To fight for their rights, they should participate more and more in unions so that these should be highlighted at the bargaining table with other important issues, as it has been experienced by women workers that their issues are usually not taken up by male unionists as they don't consider their issues important.

Efforts put in by CITU are as follows.

CITU has been opposing blanket permission for night shift work for women and demanded that the trade unions must be consulted before allowing night work for women in any sector, the employers must provide transport facilities up to their residences and ensure a safe and secure workplace for the women workers who have to work in the night shift. Coordination committees of working women must highlight and campaign on these demands wherever women work in night shifts.

Basic necessity like separate toilet is not available for most of the working women, not only in mines, factories, agriculture, construction, brick kilns, shopping complexes etc, but also to those working in schools, offices etc. This not only causes inconvenience but also affects their health. Even trade unions do not take up this demand with due seriousness. CITU affiliated unions and co-ordination committees of working women have to raise this demand.

The Factories Act and the Beedi and Cigar (Conditions of Employment) Act mandate that the employers should provide crèches. The Plantation Labor Act also stipulates that women workers should be given time off for feeding their children and that crèches should be provided wherever 50 or more women are employed or where the number of women with children below six years exceeds 20. The Mines Crèche Rules, 1966 provide for crèche facilities as well as medical examination of children and nursing mothers. But these provisions are not implemented. Unions affiliated to CITU have raised the demand for crèche facility and they are making continuous efforts to achieve the results.

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Though various efforts have been made for the benefits of working women and make them aware to join union to fight for their rights, however,

these are not enough. CITU's work among working women is not reviewed in the state committees. Proper attention is not paid to identify, train, develop and promote women cadres. No action is taken by the state committees to ensure formation of women's sub committees in unions in sectors with considerable women workers and to see that they function effectively. Holding the state conventions and constituting state level coordination committees is observed as a periodic ritual in some states while in some states even this is not done.

Conclusion & Recommendations

How can we account for the exclusion of women from trade union participation in spite of their increasing proportion in labor force? Why efforts are needed to include women in unions? What are the reasons for their low participation? These are the key questions addressed by this paper. Results indicate that male dominance, attitude of union members towards women workers, organizational politics, personal responsibilities and feeling of self-efficacy were the main barriers to women occupying key positions in union offices and so the issues concerning women remains behind the bargaining table. The basic weakness lies in the influence of the class divided patriarchal society along with the lack of consciousness on the urgency of organizing and activating working women in leading bodies of CITU at all levels. CITU as a whole has to make conscious and sustained effort to overcome these weaknesses.

In order to increase participation of women in trade unions and to curb problems of working women, the following tasks are proposed by CITU as a future plan of action.

At the National Level: It is recommended to conduct the national workshop with the participation of state CITU leaders and conveners of state coordination committee of Working Women at the earliest. The sub-committee for working women constituted at the national level should meet at least once in two months to monitor and follow up the implementation of the decisions.

At the State Level: It is recommended to designate the responsibility of the work among working women to a state office bearer of CITU working from the state centre. It is also needed to ensure that the major federations of CITU with considerable women members constitute women's sub committees at the national level and make them functional. It is advised to allot a full time cadre, preferably a woman, at the state centre, for work among working women. It is also proposed to immediately constitute a small sub-committee of 3-4 members, including an office bearer in charge of the work among working women and the convener of the state coordination committee of working women, and conduct a state wide campaign on the demands of working women; campaign to be concentrated on sectors where both men and women work and should consist of wide distribution of leaflets, sectoral meetings and submission of memoranda to the administration at dif-

ferent levels; efforts should be made to involve the women's sub-committees of fraternal trade unions in this campaign.

At the Coordination Committee Level: It is advised to conduct a state level campaign on the charter of demands of working women among all sections of working women in the state making efforts to approach wider sections of working women. Efforts should be made for the formation of state CCWW and wherever possible district level CCWW and make them functional. Serious efforts should be made for the formation of women's sub-committees in CITU affiliated unions in industries with large number of women like plantations, construction, brick kilns, medical and sales representatives, health employees, municipal and sanitation workers etc. It is also opined to identify working women activists and take initiative to organize trade union classes and develop them to take up more responsibilities in their unions and also to make efforts to increase the presence of women in the decision making bodies of CITU and its affiliated unions at various levels.

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Annexure 1 Women Membership in CITU (2008 – 2011)

S no	State	2008			2011		
		Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%
1	AP	437403	131184	29.99	664789	207548	31.2
2	Assam	70947	31773	44.78	106731	54298	50.9
3	Bihar	23035	11576	50.25	48357	17365	35.9
4	Chattisgarh	16339	2830	17.32	21274	3471	16.3
5	Delhi	36813	1704	4.62	60195	6747	11.2
6	Gujarat	14664	2101	14.32	24974	10172	40.7
7	Haryana	64635	18078	27.96	106569	36269	34
8	HP	38,485	23990	62.34	44009	23413	53.2
9	J & K	4372	32	0.73	7102	767	10.8
10	Jharkhand	90532	22,759	25.13	146109	40529	27.7
11	Karnataka	160704	95103	59.17	228303	110972	48.6
12	Kerala	1268428	377044	29.72	1511383	529232	35

13	MP	36578	8671	23.70	57226	24492	42.8
14	Maharashtra	82678	42484	51.38	154513	78085	50.5
15	Odisha	108699	35807	32.94	174495	62726	35.9
16	Punjab	53297	14293	26.81	135511	40802	30.1
17	Rajasthan	36737	2971	8.08	57725	3853	6.7
18	Tamil Nadu	479147	118281	24.68	546318	154318	28.2
19	Tripura	156694	45364	28.95	197104	76311	38.7
20	UP	30218	656	2.17	30235	960	3.2
21	Uttarakhand	20261	5756	28.40	45703	13618	29.8
22	West Bengal	1755954	277050	15.77	1421650	354726	25
23	A & N Islands	2992	0	0	3443	183	5.3
24	Goa	677	-	-	443	3	0.7
	Total	4990289	12,69,509	25.43	5794161	1850860	31.9

Source: www.citucentre.org

Annexure 2 Delegates in the 17 State Conferences Held before the 14th Conference of CITU

Sl no	State	Total delegates	Women	% in delegates	% in CITU members (2011)
1	AP	669	168	25.11	31.2
2	Assam	249	93	37.35	50.9
3	Chattisgarh	172	20	11.62	16.3
4	Delhi	157	4	2.54	11.2
5	Haryana	253	58	21.64	34
6	HP	221	58	26.24	53.2
7	Jharkhand	284	69	24.29	27.7
8	Karnataka	315	90	28.57	48.6
9	Kerala	487	65	13.34	35
10	MP	230	52	21.05	42.8
11	Maharashtra	303	78	24.76	50.5
12	Odisha	313	59	18.55	35.9
13	Rajasthan	216	10	4.62	6.7
14	Tamil Nadu	694	114	16.42	28.2
15	UP	214	17	7.72	3.2
16	Uttarakhand	172	40	23.25	29.8
17	West Bengal	1360	152	11.17	25

Source: www.citucentre.org

Annexure 3 Women Elected in the State Conferences Held before the 14th Conference of CITU

Sl no	State	Office Bearers			State Committee		
		Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%
1	AP	27	5	18.52	119	33	27.73
2	Assam	19	3	15.79	51	12	23.53
3	Chattisgarh	17	2	11.76	45	4	8.89
4	Delhi	12	1	8.33	43	3	6.98
5	Haryana	20	2	10	62	10	16.13
6	HP	21	3	14.29	59	14	23.72
7	Jharkhand	35	1	2.86	126	10	7.94

Participation of Women in Trade Unions

8	Karnataka	35	8	22.86	85	22	26.64
9	Kerala	30	3	10	157	12	7.64
10	MP	21	3	14.29	66	7	10.61
11	Maharashtra	35	8	22.86	78	20	25.64
12	Odisha	25	2	8	88	14	15.91
13	Rajasthan	17	1	5.88	56	3	5.36
14	Tamil Nadu	36	5	13.89	138	17	12.32
15	Tripura						
16	UP	17	2	11.76	49	2	4.08
17	Uttarakhand	18	2	11.11	42	8	19.05
18	West Bengal	32	3	9.38	166	15	9.04

Source: www.citucentre.org

Annexure 4 Women General Council/Working Committee Members Elected in the 14th Conference of CITU

Sl no	State	General Council members		Working Committee members	
		Total	Women	Total	Women
1	AP	48	14	14	4
2	Assam	8	2	2	-
3	Bihar	3	-	1	-
4	Chattisgarh	1	-	0	-
5	Delhi	4	-	1	-
6	Gujarat	2	-	0	-
7	Haryana	8	1	2	-
8	HP	3	1	1	-
9	J & K	1	-	0	-
10	Jharkhand	10	1	3	-
11	Karnataka	16	3	5	-
12	Kerala	109	10	31	2
13	MP	4	-	1	-
14	Maharashtra	11	1	3	-
15	Odisha	13	1	4	-
16	Punjab	10	1	3	1
17	Rajasthan	3	-	1	-
18	Tamil Nadu	39	4	11	-
19	Tripura	14	3	4	-
20	UP	2	-	1	-
21	Uttarakhand	3	-	1	-
22	West Bengal	106	11	31	4
	Centre	7		4	
	Total	425	53	124	11

Source: www.citucentre.org

Note: 9 states –Bihar, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand do not have women representatives in the national general council of CITU