

## WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES : AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON THE SELECTED LEATHER UNITS OF KOLKATA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study of trade unionism became a crucial matter in the industrial relations as the relationship between labour and management is greatly influenced by them. Even, after liberalization, contrary to the prediction of many observers, the significance of the trade unions have not been reduced. The role of the trade unions have been modified rather and have become a key decider of fate of large number of workers specially in the labour intensive industries across the globe. Leather industry is one of the highest employment generating industry in India and as per the estimate the sector can generate about 6 million direct and indirect employment by the end of 2015, if the 10% growth trend continues. Currently about 2.5 million people are earning their livelihood from this sector across India in different major concentrations like. Though there are thousands of small and medium units are functioning as the unorganized units, yet some large and very large organizations have also come into fray over the years. Trade unionism is a common practice in many of these organizations and the nature of trade union formation experiences a greater variation from small, medium to large organizations. In the small and medium leather organizations trade unions are functioning under the industrial union banner, whereas in large organizations unions are mostly organization specific. The paper attempts to study the extent of workers participation in union activities according to different variables like age, length of service, education, origin etc.*

### INTRODUCTION

Soft as skin, not soft as silk... that's how it is in the Indian leather story that tells a tale of a \$6 billion industry employing about 2.5 million people crafting shoes, saddles and bags for the world and hoping to triple its exports by 2015, if the current growth rate of 10% continues. The sector can also accommodate about 6 million work force directly or indirectly. Helping the success story are the low costs, widely available raw material and world class quality that make India one of the world's fastest growing leather hubs. With about 10 percent of the world's raw material, India's leather exports make up around two percent of world trade and rose by 12 percent during 2008-2011 to about \$2 billion. The leather and leather products industry is one of India's oldest manufacturing industries that catered to the international market right from the middle of the nineteenth century, the demand for its products being both domestic as well as international right from the beginning. About 46 per cent of the production in the sector is exported and it ranks eighth in the list of India's top export earning industries and contributes roughly Rs. 10,000 crores

per annum, i.e., about 4 per cent to export earnings. The sector accounts for 2.5 per cent of the global leather-related trade of Rs. 387,200 crores. An estimated 15 per cent of total purchase of leading global brands in footwear, garments, leather goods & accessories, in Europe, and 10 percent of global supply is outsourced from India. Therefore, the dynamics of the industry has been shaped to a large extent by export orientation from colonial times. The sector is dominated by small-scale firms although there also exist a significant number of medium and large sized firms in all segments of the industry. The industry is concentrated in several leather clusters in four or five distinct locations in the country, with each cluster containing a wide variety of enterprise forms and organizational structure. To be more specific, the major production centers of leather and leather products are located at Chennai, Ambur, Ranipet, Vaniyambadi, Trichy, Dindigul in Tamil Nadu, Kolkata in West Bengal, Kanpur and Agra in U.P., Calendar in Punjab, Delhi, Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, Bangalore in Karnataka and Mumbai in Maharashtra. Tamil Nadu is the biggest leather exporter (40%) of the country and its share in

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India's output on leather products is 70%.

**THE LABOUR SCENARIO IN INDIAN LEATHER INDUSTRY:**

The Leather Industry is Labour intensive and is concentrated in the small and cottage industry sectors. While leather shoes and uppers are concentrated in large scale units, the sandals and chappals are produced in the household and cottage sector. The leather industry employs about 2.5 million people. The industry is also one with strong links with the social structure through caste and community. Thus a large number of people engaged in the industry (entrepreneurs as well as workers) are even today from traditional leather working castes (belonging to the lower castes in the caste hierarchy) and the Muslim community. Due to the age of the industry and its links with the social structure, the organizational structure that has emerged is a very complex one that contains within it elements of continuity with traditional structures as well as those that represent a break with them. The processes in the footwear making include last making, pattern cutting, clicking, sewing, Assembling and finishing. There is no gender selectivity in child labor. Adults earn wages that are only marginally higher than what the children earn. Irrespective of the experience, skill and family size and requirements the wage payment system remains insensitive and relatively inelastic. Children contribute 20 to 40 per cent of the family income. The labor in the leather industry is defined by the caste location. While market forces predominantly govern all other aspects of the industry, the labor is drawn exclusively from the most downtrodden section. As heads of 60 per cent of the households are engaged in leather work, the leather sector study establishes the incidence of child labor in leather flaying as an intergenerational phenomenon.

Women are also employed in large numbers in Indian leather industry and are making important contribution to the national economy as well as to exports. Women are involved in large numbers, especially in footwear production in Athani (Karnataka), Rajasthan, Agra (UP) and Chennai, Ambur, Ranipet and Vaniambadi (Tamil Nadu). Their entry into productive work has helped considerably in improving their household situation. With the 'take off' of the footwear industry, especially in the last 20 years and the rapid

rise of exports, women's employment has increased. The leather industry has been designated as a hazardous industry under the Factory Act 1948, and has a mandatory requirement of formal approvals for expansion. It has been observed that formal units expand and set up illegal units, where the bulk of women workers, especially dalit women are found. Women are not documented as 'workers' on any official records. Therefore, they are not legally entitled to any compensations or benefits. These women are recruited through contractors and are engaged in all stages of the tanning process. Their tasks are time consuming, backbreaking and the most hazardous.

**LEATHER INDUSTRY IN WEST BENGAL:**

With its large livestock population, West Bengal produces 8 percent of India's cowhides and 11 percent of its goatskins. Large quantities of skins from Bihar (India's second largest producer of hides) and U.P. are also tanned here. Bata India Ltd. (BIL) has India's largest tannery (annual capacity 335,000 cow and buffalo hides) in a Calcutta suburb. Apart from BIL, leather is tanned by 600 small-scale, family-owned units concentrated in the Tanagra, Tiljala and Topsia areas. The largest of these is the USD 7 million Taj Leather Works (TLW).

West Bengal accounts for 65 percent of India's leather goods exports. But its share of total Indian leather and leather goods exports is 15 percent. The European Union and North America are the leading importers of West Bengal's leather and leather goods (79 percent and 12 percent respectively). Unfortunately, West Bengal is generally considered a source of low-priced, poor quality leather goods. Improving the quality of both leather and leather goods is a problem as most tanneries and manufacturers are small and cannot afford the investments required to upgrade production facilities. Only a few manufacturers have modern equipment. But most of them are handicapped by low overall production capacity, which prevents them executing large export orders. However, West Bengal is still considered India's largest manufacturer of leather goods. In addition to BIL (annual capacity over 20 million pairs of shoes/uppers) there are approximately 20,000 small units making footwear/uppers (12 million pairs per year); industrial gloves (50 million pairs per year);

garments (800,000 pieces per year); and accessories and luggage 35 million pieces per year).

Kolkata is the single largest concentration of leather industry in West Bengal. Traditionally , Kolkata offers the leather industry several advantages like easy availability of a wide variety of leather (cow, calf, buffalo, sheep, goat, kid); low production costs; a large pool of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers at competitive rates; and abundant water and power. An airport and two ports facilitate exports.

**LABOUR SCENARIO IN WEST BENGAL LEATHER INDUSTRY:**

West Bengal's leather industry employs over 200,000 people. As far as working conditions of West Bengal leather industries are concerned, Bata India Ltd. (BIL), Taj Leather Works (TLW) and a few other units like Khadims etc. are the exception. In addition to salubrious working conditions, BIL's workers enjoy subsidized housing, medical facilities and numerous other benefits. TLW has modern machines with devices to prevent accidents and injuries to workers. In contrast, working conditions in the tanneries and the leather manufacturing units are generally appalling and there is scant regard for workers' safety or health. However, with the shifting of large number of leather industry organizations to newly built Calcutta Leather Complex (CLC) near Bantala, which is spreaded over across 1100 acres of land with all modern infrastructure and technical amenities about 50000 directly employed workers and about 150000 indirectly dependent work-force are enjoying better working conditions than their counterparts working in traditional concentrations . Composition of work-force in both traditional and modern leather organizations are however divided into regular and casual workers under the company pay-roll and the very large number of workforce under the contractors.

**TRENDS OF TRADE UNIONISM IN KOLKATA LEATHER CLUSTER:**

Trends of trade unionism in Kolkata is nothing unique . As the industry witnesses moderate to large scale trade union participation in medium to large units. The industry witnesses maximum union

participation in tanneries in terms of small and medium scale operations , whereas , very limited existence of trade union is the general feature of the most of the fabricating units and the export units . As the maximum intensity of trade union activities is observed in tanneries only the scholarly investigation has identified the existence of multi-union situation at the industry level covering most of such units in Kolkata leather cluster. These industry level unions are all affiliated to two or three major political parties and enjoy very high command over thousands of workers , both regular and casual , in Kolkata leather industry. However , few units engaged in fabrication jobs , employing more than 500 workers also witness the same trend . Large organizations like Bata , Taj Leather works , Khadims etc. have the workers' unions , but these are mostly organization specific or craft unions based on nature of occupational engagements . As per the recent estimate about 62% of the workforce employed in tanneries (mostly under small and unorganized types) in Kolkata leather cluster hold the membership of some other trade union , whereas in large organized leather business organizations about 79%-82% workers are the members of any of the unions .Both the industry level unions covering the small and medium size unit workers and the organization specific unions in large units have their agenda , which are surprisingly similar in many situations . Both types of unions are concerned with the issues like job security and protection from retrenchment/lay-off , minimum physical facility provisions for the workers , payment of minimum wages , bonus , incentives etc. However , on the leadership issue external involvement is higher in industry level union coverage on small and medium unit workers , whereas the power mostly lies with internal leadership in the large scale unit specific unions , though the external political control is very much there .

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

The wide variety of literatures both of academic and non-academic nature are available on the different aspects of the topic discussed in the paper. However, only few major literatures have been covered here to provide a comprehensive idea about the research trends on the different dimensions of current research.

The review of literature has been classified into two major areas;

- Literatures on the trade unionism in India
- Literatures on the leather industry of Kolkata
- Literatures on the workers' participation in the trade unions in leather industry of Kolkata

Trade Unions have become an integral and powerful factor in the contemporary system of production and distribution system. Modern industrialization has paved the way for trade unions. They are now exercising a strong influence on the methods of production of goods and services, their distribution, the allocation of economic resources, the volume of employment and unemployment, the character of of rights and privileges, policies of governments, the attitude and status of legal masses of population, and the very nature of economic and social organisations. However, under such conditions, their role has evoked deep and wide controversies. Therefore, the large pool of available literatures on trade unionism is clearly divided on their role in controlling the macro and micro aspects of economy, policy, employment and governance.

*Sen, Ratna (2003)* has explained the development of Indian trade Unionism based on the main emphasis of the trade union theories. She has further explained the back-ground of the different trade unions on evolution of political groups in India along with some unique characteristics of many others, specially the local unions under the patronage of different charismatic personalities. Prior to the research of *Prof. Sen, Mathur and Mathur (1962), Reveri (1972), Soman (1957), Karnik (1960), Kennedy (1955), Sharma (1963), Fonseca (1964), Ghosh (1960) and Malhotra (1963)* have provided a lot of information both theoretical and empirical on trade union movement in India. *Mathur and Mathur, Karnik, Ghosh* have traced the history of trade union movement in India. The studies of *Kennedy (1955), Vaid (1962), Dufty (1964), Fonseca (1964), Sharma (1963), Johri (1967), Soman (1957), Nigam (1984), Agarwal (1984) and Bhangoo (1987)* have raised the issues such as process of unionism, its role in economic development, role of the legislation and government in promoting unionism, new problems and challenges of trade unions and other related issues of trade unionism in India. The major

limitations of these studies are their excessive dependence on secondary data without using behavioral data. The studies on unionism at the area, industry and enterprise level are very few in India. *Kulkarni's (1946)* research was the pace-setter in real sense in this regard. *Kennedy (1955), Sheth (1960), Singh (1968), Murphy (1981), Gaur (1986), and Asdhir (1987)* have studied trade unionism in Bombay, Tamil Nadu, Ahmedabad, Rajasthan and Punjab by applying historical approach. *Pandey and Vikram (1969)* studied trade unions in Delhi's construction industry and *Bograte (1968)* have worked on the trade union movement among the Kolkata Dock workers. The important area, industry or plant level studies include those of *Mast (1969), Thakur (1968), Punekar (1958), Vaid (1965), Ramaswamy (1977), Sahoo (1977), Monga (1973), Arya (1980), Sinha (1984)* etc. The studies indicate that there has not been any significant difference in characteristics of trade unions at area, industry, state and national levels with regard to multiplicity of units, inter-union and intra-union rivalries and other important aspects of the trade unionism.

*Pandey and Vikram (1969)* have done the causal analysis on level of workers' participation in trade unions in industries. They have identified the attributes such as lack of enlightened leadership, illiteracy among workers, managements' hostility, low interest of the etc. The studies of *Dayal and Sharma (1970), Sinha and Paul (1963), Ganguli (1954), Sayles and Strauss (1953), Monga and Mogga (1981) and Mukherjee (1985)* have investigated the variables, attitude toward unions' functions and other perceptions regarding unions. These studies have mainly investigated the relationship between trade union participation and different variables like age, length of service, rural or urban background and educational level.

Significant researches have also been observed on the fundamental characteristics of trade union leadership in India. The researches in this regard can be witnessed in the streams like dependence of leadership efficiency on different demographic factors of the leader, level of political interference in trade union leaderships etc. *Mathur and Raman (1962), Dayal and Sharma (1976), Singh (1980) and Rao (1984)* have attempted to analyse the leadership efficiency with the help of factors like age, gender, caste, parental occupation, political affiliation etc. *Reindrop*

(1971), Ramaswamy (1977) and Acharji (1980) have observed that the outsiders, mainly the political leaders play the dominant role in the functions of trade unions in many industries. Patabhi (1967), Aziz (1974), Ashraf (1974), Baveskar (1974) in their research works have highlighted the political manipulations, dependence and weakness of the unions and the use of union funds for different political purposes. Nanda (1968) and Ramaswamy (1971) have contributed something very significant on the research of the out-side political intervention in trade union leadership in many parts of the country. They have categorically shown the role of politically affiliated trade unions in civil elections in different parts of the country.

Available literatures on leather industry in Kolkata mostly comprises of different reports, monographs and few research papers. Report of Council of Indian Leather exports (2005) has provided the information that West Bengal used to account for 65 percent of India's leather goods exports (1999-2000 exports were valued at USD 226 million). But its share of total Indian leather and leather goods exports is 15 percent. The European Union and North America are the leading importers of West Bengal's leather and leather goods (79 percent and 12 percent respectively). Unfortunately, West Bengal is generally considered a source of low-priced, poor quality leather goods. Improving the quality of both leather and leather goods is a problem as most tanneries and manufacturers are small and cannot afford the investments required to upgrade production facilities. Only a few manufacturers have modern equipment. But most of them are handicapped by low overall production capacity, which prevents them executing large export orders. However, West Bengal is still considered India's largest manufacturer of leather goods. In addition to BIL (annual capacity over 20 million pairs of shoes/uppers) there are approximately 20,000 small units making footwear/uppers (12 million pairs per year); industrial gloves (50 million pairs per year); garments (800,000 pieces per year); and accessories and luggage 35 million pieces per year. Annual Report of the Indian leather producers Association (2009) has observed that Kolkata is the single largest concentration of leather industry in West Bengal and Kolkata offers the leather industry several advantages like easy availability of a wide variety of

leather (cow, calf, buffalo, sheep, goat, kid); low production costs; a large pool of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers at competitive rates; and abundant water and power. An airport and two ports facilitate exports. West Bengal's leather industry directly and indirectly employs over 200,000 people. Roy, Satyaki (2009) has conducted an extensive research on the institutional failures and imperfections that prevail in the supply of indivisible inputs and collective action in a typical 'low-road' cluster in Kolkata and has argued that market failures due to existence of information imperfections, externalities and public good and the institutional failure to resolve those shortcomings only partially explain the depressed status of these clusters, including Kolkata leather cluster. He further added that, the explanation critically rests on the fact of asymmetric power relations and conflicts arising between the trader and the small producer reproducing a production relation that thwarts the high road growth path. The spawning of small enterprises in such clusters is a result of self-exploitative fragmentation that does not flow from entrepreneurship, but from the survival strategy of labour in the context of depressed wages, as the author added. In this working paper the author has highlighted all comprehensive issues like production organisation, labour process and other issues pertaining to the socio-economic analysis of the functioning of the leather cluster of Kolkata. The paper further observes that most of the units are owned by the male and about 87.5% of the units surveyed by the author are either owned as proprietorship or as family owned house-hold work. The paper further classifies the units of Kolkata leather cluster into three categories-the units those produce more than 200 pairs per week, those producing in between 200-500 pairs per week and those producing more than 500 units per week. The paper has only included those units, which are producing shoes and finally observes that the success depends on the dynamic relationship between producer and the trader and the appropriate government intervention in streamlining the process of technology up-gradation, process improvement etc. Though, very few literatures have been identified on the work-force pattern and labour practices in the leather industry in Kolkata, but the research by Roy, Satyaki (2009) may be considered as the pioneering works

on the issue. *Report on leather industry including footwear and other art works in India*, published by the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India (2008) has given a comprehensive picture on the working conditions and social backgrounds of the workers, working in the leather industry across India, including the leather industry at Kolkata, which should be considered as another important source to depend on.

Surprisingly very less number of research materials are available on the trade union participation in Kolkata leather cluster, though adequate sources may be available on the same subject in many other industries. Mostly news paper reports published on workers agitations against different collective issues can be used here for the purpose. Therefore, an important research gap can be easily identified here paving the way of empirical investigation.

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The paper has three main research objectives:

- i) To evaluate the extent of workers participation in trade unions activities in the sample organizations in general,
- ii) To evaluate the reasons for workers' joining trade unions
- iii) The relationship between workers' participation in trade union activities and different variables like age, length of service, education, strike participation, aspirations for promotion, wage satisfaction etc.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

As the Kolkata leather cluster comprises of four different types of units like tanner, fabricator, tanner cum fabricator and manufacturer, the sample has been selected accordingly for the purpose of study. Four different units have been selected as the sample on the basis of criteria like their distinctive business orientation, the minimum number of workers employed during the last one year and a minimum percentage of workers subscribed to a specific union at their workplace. For the purpose, the units with minimum number of hundred workers and at least 40% union membership comprising both regular and contract workers have been included in the sample. The random stratified sampling technique has been adopted for the same. A structured

questionnaire has been prepared and distributed among 250 workers across the units through the unit supervisors. The responses from 243 workers were received within 90 days. After initial screening, five response sheets were rejected as these had been found either incomplete or the responders have mistakenly opted for more than one options to the same question.

After obtaining the data through structured questionnaire, the specific statistical techniques including multiple response analysis and activity frequency analysis have been adopted to explain different aspects of the research objectives. Ranking method has been used to evaluate the relative importance of different factors to facilitate the decisions of joining and non-joining to the trade unions in respective units. Relationship between union participation and different variables has been measured through concentration of different groups along with the observable parameters.

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

*On the issue of the rate of workers' participation in trade unions* in the sample organizations, it is also required to assess sample unit wise trade union memberships by the regular and irregular workforce. Following table shows sample unit-wise detailed status of trade union memberships and surveyed workers with union affiliations.

From the above table it can be understood that in sample unit 1 and sample unit 4, all the regular workers are the parts of respective unions, whereas in sample unit 3, not all the regular workers, but nearly all (about 94.11%) have the union affiliations. In comparison with other three units unit 1 seems to be least unionized in terms of regular workforce. Only 69.76% are the members of the union there. When, we analyse the level of union participation from the irregular workforce perspectives in these sample units, unit 4 shows highest union participation, i.e. about 82.19%, followed by unit 3 (77%), unit 1 (70.14%) and unit 2 (63.85%). From this observation, the comparative analysis of rate of trade union participation by regular and irregular workers at the sample units can be presented as below:

The above statement shows that on an average unit 4 has the highest union membership rate among all . This is due to very high trade union membership rates both by the regular and irregular workers of the unit. Unit 2 has relatively lower average trade union membership rate as the trade union membership rate by the irregular workers is relatively lowest there.

From the questionnaire survey it was also attempted to evaluate the level of workers' participation in union activities at all sample units. Seven activities have been identified as the nature of union participation like attending meetings, taking part in strikes and dharnas, collective funds , canvassing for the union, voting for the union leaders , talking about the union with the colleagues , reading and distributing union notices-pamphlets and circulars .

However, for the convenience of research analysis , only five major union activities have been included in the questionnaire. Here the surveyed members of the unions at the sample units show three major trends , i.e., canvassing for the respective unions , taking part in dharnas and collection of funds for the unions. Other activities have been found not so significant activity as revealed from the survey. Moreover , it has been observed that more than 60% of the surveyed union members from regular employment category and nearly 70% from irregular employment category are actively engaged in trade union activities. Out of which about 80% are involved in more than two activities as KLUW members , whereas about 90% WBCLU members regularly participate in more than two union activities in all the units. Following table shows the pattern of workers' participation in trade union activities in the sample units.

Following table shows the detailed unit-wise statement of sampling:

*Table 1: Unit wise description of samples*

Sample units	Total workers	Regular	Casual/contract/Irregular	Total regular workers surveyed	Total Irregular workers surveyed
Unit 1*	110	43	67	22	36
Unit 2**	106	23	83	12	43
Unit 3***	123	51	72	35	34
Unit 4****	102	29	73	18	38
Total	441	146	295	87	151

\*Tannery ( Kim Ling Tannery) , \*\*Fabricator ( Mukesh Agarwal and Associates ) , \*\*\* Tanner cum fabricator ( Ahmedia Brothers ) , \*\*\*\* Manufacturer ( Leather house )

*Table- 2: Sample unit wise trade union membership*

Sample units	Regular workers having trade union membership	Irregular workers having trade union membership	Surveyed trade union members from regular workers	Surveyed trade union members from irregular workers
Unit 1	30	47	16	30
Unit 2	23	53	07	32
Unit 3	48	56	29	24
Unit 4	29	60	10	29

*Table 3: Comparative statement of trade union participation at the sample units level*

	Percentage of trade union participation by regular workers	Percentage of trade union participation by irregular workers	Average percentage of trade union participation
Unit 1	69.76	70.14	70 (approx.)
Unit 2	100	63.85	82(approx.)
Unit 3	94.11	77	86(approx.)
Unit 4	100	82.19	91(approx.)

*Table 4: Workers' participation in union activities in sample units*

Trade union activities	Unit1		Unit 2		Unit 3		Unit4		Total
	KLWU (16)	WBCLU (30)	KLWU (7)	WBCLU (32)	KLWU (24)	WBCLU (27)	KLWU (10)	WBCLU (29)	
Only one activity	02	0	0	01	03	01	01	0	08
Two activities	15	26	05	28	16	16	07	24	137
More than two activities	01	04	02	03	05	10	02	05	32



Therefore, majority KLUW members (about 65%) across four sample units and about 79% of WBCLU members are involved in two union activities comprising of attending meetings , joining dharnas and canvassing for the unions.

Multiple response analysis technique has been applied to further explore the trade union activities by regular and irregular workers of the three sample units , following trend become more visible .Following table shows the types of trade union activities involved by the regular and irregular workers in sample unit 1.Act 1 denotes canvassing for the union, Act 2 denotes participating in dharnas , agitations , Act 3 denotes collecting fund for the unions and Act 4 speaks about distribution of leaflets, pamphlets etc. From the activity frequency analysis, it has been observed that in sample unit 1 , two most engaging union activities remain Act 2 and Act 3 , i.e. canvassing for their unions and participation in dharnas etc. About 36.8 percentage of surveyed union members from both the regular and casual workers are involved in canvassing for their unions and about 31.6% have been involved in agitation activities organized by their respective unions in sample unit 1 .

At the sample unit 2 level , maximum number of union members (73.1%) have participated in canvassing for their unions followed by joining agitations (69.2%) and collecting funds for the union activities (50%).

At the sample unit 3 level , most of the unionized workers are involved in joining agitations (66.7%) , followed by almost equal participation in canvassing for the union and fund raising . It has been observed that 26 workers , both regular and irregular type have participated in agitating activities called by their unions , whereas 24 workers have been the part of either canvassing or fundraising activities apart from any other activities .

The survey feedback on the union activity involvement pattern in sample unit 4 shows that though majority of the workers , i.e. 19 out of 21 is involved in two union activities , how ever , further analysis shows that about 60.7% are engaged in fund raising for their unions. This is a surprising trend among all the four sample units indeed.

On the issue of *finding out the reasons* for workers' joining trade unions in the sample units , six alternatives were provided to the surveyed workers and they were asked to choose most important factor for joining to the union. The responses reveal that to get a rise in wages ranked first in all four units , specially among the regular workers . From the survey feedback , it has been observed that about 32% of the regular workers have joined the union with the key objective of wage hike possibilities. Job security remains the most important motivator to become the part of union among the irregular workers .About 55% of the irregular workers and trade union members have chosen the concern for job security as the key motivating factor for joining trade unions. The analysis further shows most important workers perception about for joining unions are almost similar in all four units. However , different other factors have also been identified by the surveyed workforce as better working facilities at sample unit 3 and sample unit 4 levels . Here , at sample unit 3 , very small percentage of irregular workers ( 9.37%) and at sample unit 4 , relatively smaller number of regular workers (13.79%) have identified the same as the most important facilitating factor for joining trade unions .

The reasons behind joining trade unions by the workers from these four units not only represents two distinct tendencies among regular and irregular workers, i.e. wage hike to the regular workers (members of KLUW) and Job-security to the irregular workers (WBCLU members), but also some other responses like very negligible importance attached to the factor of bonus factor by irregular workers (only at unit 4) etc. The study further explores that the demographic profile of the workers are somehow responsible for these different orientations towards trade unionism across four sample units covered in the study. As the issue of continuous job availability is a major concern to most of the casual workers , as revealed from the survey and the wage issue is the concern for the regular workers , but the minor deviations from these general tendencies can be mostly related to other factors like personal closeness to the union leadership at the unit level, duration of service with the same unit or in the same industry etc. Therefore. The study has been done on the basis of five causal

factors of joining trade unions. However, the level of significance of the relevant factors as the cause behind joining trade unions can be explained only on the basis of advanced analysis as all these factors have been found to be relevant in the context of contemporary research observations.

*On the issue of workers' participation in trade union activities* across different variables like age, length of service, rural or urban background, educational level, migrant-local origin, regular and irregular nature and married-unmarried a detailed study has been conducted. The study has categorized the level of workers' participation into three scales like low/negligible, average, high participation. The workers' participating in only one union activity has been grouped under low/negligible group, workers' participating in two activities have been classified under average group and involvement in more than two activities have the union members under high participation group. The research attempts to distribute these groups across different demographic variables and then the correlations between these variables and union participation rate have been derived. Following table represents the variable specific level of involvement or participation in union activities by the surveyed workers in the same units.

From the above findings, following observations can be made:

- i. Nearly half of the total number of responding union members fall under 31-40 years, i.e., about 51%.
- ii. Maximum number of respondents are working in the unit for more than one year, but not more than three years, i.e., about 45%.
- iii. Maximum union members are school drop outs, i.e., about 44%.
- iv. Majority of the union members are migrant from other states, i.e., about 53%.
- v. About 62% of the union members are irregular workers.
- vi. About 59% union members are married.

Therefore, some general conclusions can be derived on the basis of above findings:

- Approximately 75% of the union members across age group are involved in average activities like more than one but less than three activities.
- Approximately more than 84% of the union members across length of service group are involved in average activities like more than one but less than three activities.
- Educational qualification wise as well, more than 91% union members are involved in average activities like more than one but less than three activities.
- Same trend is observed across different origin, i.e., 85% union members are involved in average activities like more than one but less than three activities and about 86% union members irrespective of their marital status are involved in average activities like more than one but less than three activities.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The findings of the study are of good significance for many reasons. *Firstly*, the paper is a glimpse of contemporary demographic characteristics of an highly employment generating industry, i.e. the leather industry. *Secondly*, the study is one of its kind on Kolkata leather industry as the detailed study on the issue has been found to be nearly absent in the knowledge domain. *Thirdly*, the study has further opened up the possibilities of large scale research on the impact of demographic trends in industrial relations scenario in Kolkata leather industry. *Fourthly*, the very fundamental observations of the paper have highlighted the needs of some immediate interventions by the appropriate authority at the required level to facilitate the process of decent work practices etc. as mentioned by ILO in its mission agenda for 2020. *Finally*, the paper can be further expanded on the certain grounds like cross sectional analysis in terms of impact multiple variables of trade union participation across the workforce in the industry.

#### LIMITATIONS OF STUDY:

The study has the limitations as all the data have been collected through single source self reported measures. Therefore, common method variance may

be a major problem. Responses of individual survey items may not be truly independent as there has been a chance influence of group membership. From this perspective , it can be said that more research is needed to examine the generalization of this study.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The study is a systematic effort to understand the contemporary trends of trade unionism in

organized leather industry of Kolkata . This has not only highlighted the issues like the existence of politically influenced blanket unionism , but also indicated briefly about the different priorities of different segments of the trade union members across industry. The major concerns of different groups , the different levels of involvements etc. have been highlighted as the first hand observation , which can be selectively used or referred for further research.

*Table 5 : Factoral analysis of joining trade unions*

Reasons	Unit 1		Unit 2		Unit 3		Unit 4	
	KLWU	WBCLU	KLWU	WBCLU	KLWU	WBCLU	KLWU	WBCLU
Wage hike	8 (50%)	7 (23%)	7 (100%)	4 (12.5%)	14 (48%)	4 (17%)	7 (70%)	6 (21%)
Bonus	3 (19%)	-	-	-	6 (12%)	-	3 (30%)	6 (21%)
Better welfare facilities	-	-	-	3 (9%)	3 (14%)	-	-	-
Strength of unity	-	5 (17%)	-	5 (16%)	3 (10%)	-	-	-
Stand against victimization	5 (31%)	8 (26%)	-	-	-	4 (17%)	-	-
Job security	-	10 (30%)	-	17 (62.5%)	2 (7%)	16 (67%)	-	20 (61%)

Table 6: Demographic variable wise distribution of level of union activity involvement

Variables	Low/negligible involvement	Average involvement	High involvement
<b>Age</b>			
20-30 years	0	64	15
31-40 years	16	62	11
41 and above	2	6	1
<b>Length of service</b>			
Less than one year	2	43	6
1-3 years	4	65	11
More than 3 years	1	41	4
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	0	39	4
School drop out	5	71	2
Matric and above	2	52	2
<b>Origin</b>			
Local	4	87	2
Migrant	5	64	14
<b>Nature of employment</b>			
Regular	2	59	6
Irregular	4	102	4
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married	3	96	7
Unmarried	5	57	9

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