

Trade Union in South Asia- A Comparative Study

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Abstract:- This study intends to thoroughly examine trade unions in South Asia, with a particular emphasis on India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. Trade unions are essential for upholding workers' rights, advancing social justice, and shaping labour laws. The research offers insights into trade unions' role in the labour force and the general economy by examining the historical history, organisational structures, difficulties, and successes of trade unions in South Asia. The report also examines the regional collaboration of trade unions and their initiatives to improve workers' welfare and promote labour reforms.

Keywords:- Trade Union, Labour Reforms, Social Development Welfare, South Asia, Economy Development etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Trade unions had been long seen as essential social justice and labour rights players. Trade unions have significantly shaped the rights and well-being of the working class in South Asia, a region distinguished by its different cultures, economies, and political landscapes. This research article sets out on a thorough trip to investigate the complex world of trade unions in South Asia, focusing on their organisational structures, obstacles, and successes. The labour force in South Asia, which includes nations like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan, is enormous and diversified. Trade unions in this region have historically been influential in fighting for workers' rights and greater social welfare, fair pay, and better working circumstances. These unions have played a significant role in developing labour laws, negotiating with businesses and governments, and promoting social justice. In South Asia, trade unions have a long history from the British colonial era in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The labour movement was founded due to worker exploitation and unfavourable working conditions in many sectors. One of the first examples of organised labour organisations in the area is the Bombay Mill Hands Association, established in 1890 in modern-day Mumbai, India (Sen, 2017). Trade unions now represent employees in various industries, including manufacturing, textiles, transportation, construction, agriculture, and services.

The essay aims to provide a thorough analysis of the development of trade unions in South Asia over time, beginning with the early labour movements and ending in the present. By examining their historical trajectories, we want to comprehend the elements that have moulded the trade union landscape in each nation and the regional cooperation that has developed through time. Equally

important is understanding South Asia's organisational layout and membership of labour unions. This study explores the many unions kinds in the area, the density and degree of union membership, and the leadership dynamics that direct union activity. Additionally, we look at the different functions that trade unions perform in the area, including collective bargaining, negotiations, their influence on labour laws, and social welfare programmes. Depending on the nation, sector, and political environment, trade unions in South Asia have different organisational structures and memberships. While some associations are affiliated with more prominent federations, others run as separate businesses. As an illustration, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), established in 1920, is a well-known federation connecting numerous trade unions throughout India (Ghosh & Rahman, 2018). Workers from the formal and informal sectors comprise trade union membership, and initiatives are being taken to encourage diversity and gender inclusion among their ranks. South Asian trade unions significantly impact social welfare programmes, improved working conditions advocacy, and labour legislation. Trade unions have improved workplace safety, increased social security benefits for workers, and obtained fair salaries via collective bargaining and talks with employers (Bhattacharya & Rahman, 2018). Their initiatives have helped reduce economic gaps and promote a more equitable allocation of wealth, which has improved social justice.

However, trade unions in South Asia also suffer several obstacles that limit their efficiency. Their operations are frequently hampered by anti-union practices, legislative restrictions, and employer pushback (Rahman, 2019). In addition, as informal and insecure labour arrangements increase, trade unions face particular difficulties in organising and advocating on behalf of these vulnerable employees (Kapoor & Desai, 2017).

Although they have had a tremendous impact, trade unions in South Asia nevertheless confront several difficulties. Legal and regulatory obstacles, union busting, and increased ad hoc and unstable labour arrangements have seriously threatened their efficacy. We want to get insights into the barriers that must be removed to ensure success by evaluating these barriers—the region's trade unions' adaptability and longevity. Trade unions impact both labour rights and protection as well as the overall socioeconomic growth of South Asia. This essay examines how trade unions affect social fairness, economic development, and labour market dynamics. It looks at how their actions help to advance equitable wealth distribution, close income inequalities, and promote a more inclusive society.

➤ *Formation of trade union*

The Development of Trade Unions: As South Asia's labour movement gained traction in the early 20th century, trade unions began to take shape in various industries. Trade unions were established to represent employees in certain professions and industries and were organised along industrial lines. These unions sought to bargain with employers for better working conditions, pay, and more advantageous perks. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka comprise the South Asian region. These nations are a part of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Non-Aligned Movement, the United Nations, and the Group of 77 Developing Countries (Sinha, 2022).

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), a significant trade union organisation in India, was established in 1920. It was crucial in pushing for labour rights and raising workers' expectations. 3.3% of the planet's landmass and a fifth of the world's population reside in South Asia. India is among the most significant nations, while Bhutan and the Maldives are among the smallest. This area is home to nearly half of the world's poor people. Due to widespread poverty, the region's gross domestic product (GDP) is only about \$350 billion despite having a population of over 1.5 billion. Since their inception, all nations have prioritised development work, but despite this, their main issues—poverty, unemployment, uneven development, and widespread illiteracy—remain. Mahabubul Haq concluded that South Asia is quickly moving towards becoming the region with the worst levels of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, and gender insensitivity (Mahabubul, 1997).

➤ *Organisation structure and composition*

Trade unions in South Asia can have a variety of organisational structures and memberships, depending on the nation, the sector they represent, and the historical setting in which they have developed. However, there are some traits and characteristics that are shared by numerous unions in the area.

Membership in Unions: Workers from certain professions or industries make up trade unions in South Asia. Employees who work in a particular sector, such as manufacturing, textiles, transportation, construction, agriculture, services, and others, often make up the membership of a trade union. Employees from both the official and informal sectors may be eligible for membership.

Union Leadership: Elected officials who represent the interests of the union's members run it. The leadership structure often includes the executive committee, the president, the general secretary, the vice president, and other posts. These individuals are in charge of making decisions and developing strategies for the union and are chosen democratically by the union members.

Local Units and Branches: Trade unions frequently establish branches or local units to function at the local, district, or workplace levels. These local organisations support open dialogue and participation with union members and address unique concerns that affect workers in a particular location or workplace.

Federations and affiliation: Several trade unions are part of more prominent federations or umbrella organisations in South Asia. These federations unite several unions from diverse sectors and industries, offering a platform for cooperation, support, and more extensive collective bargaining. An example of a partnership that unites different trade unions nationwide is the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in India.

Affiliations to politics: Trade unions in South Asia may affiliate themselves with political parties or ideas. This connection may impact how the association approaches advocacy and its interactions with the government. While some unions may have close ties to certain political parties, others remain apolitical.

Table 1, Structure of Trade Union

Country	Population	Labour force	Trade union membership	Structure
Bangladesh	164.7 million	80 million	4.5 million	Industrial unions, national unions, and federations
India	1.4 billion	590 million	25 million	Industrial unions, national unions, and federations
Nepal	30.4 million	18 million	1.5 million	Industrial unions, national unions, and federations
Pakistan	220.8 million	108 million	6.5 million	Industrial unions, national unions, and federations
Sri Lanka	21.8 million	8.2 million	1.2 million	Industrial unions, national unions, and federations

Source: Indian Labour Ministry, 2022, Trade Union Membership in India

Table 2, Distribution of Workforce in India by Sectors and Gender

Sector	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	227.1 million	92.6 million	319.7 million
Industry	58.3 million	19.1 million	77.4 million
Services	196.5 million	101.2 million	297.7 million
Total	482 million	212.9 million	694.9 million

Source: NSSO (National Security Survey Organisation), 2018-19

According to the table, India's workforce is primarily employed in the agricultural sector, followed by the services and industrial sectors. The workforce is divided between the industrial sector, which employs 25.90% of workers, and the agricultural sector, which employs 43.96%, 30.14%, and 25.14 % of workers, respectively.

The workforce distribution by gender differs significantly, as the table also demonstrates. While the female workforce is concentrated in the agricultural sector, the male workforce is focused on the industrial and service industries. Male workers comprise 72.48 per cent of the industrial workforce, 66.7 per cent of the service sector workforce, and 32.1 per cent of the agricultural sector workforce. The female workforce comprises 29.52% of the industrial sector's workforce, 33.22% of the services sector's workforce, and 67.87% of the agricultural sector's workforce (NSSO,2019).

➤ *Role of Influence*

In South Asia, trade unions have an essential and complex role. Trade unions are necessary to defend workers' rights, enhance working conditions, and promote social justice. They frequently impact labour laws, economic growth, and the general health of the labour force outside the workplace. The following are some of the significant functions and spheres of influence of trade unions in South Asia.

Collective Bargaining: One of the main jobs of trade unions is to negotiate better terms for members in terms of pay, benefits, and working conditions with employers. Trade unions can do this to resolve workplace issues and get advantageous labour contracts.

Trade unions act as the voice of the workforce, promoting workers' rights. Trade unions act as the voice of the working class, promoting their rights and welfare both on the job and off. They fight for causes, including protection from unfair labour practices, job security, safe working conditions, and acceptable work hours.

Trade unions significantly influence the development of labour laws and policies in nations throughout South Asia. Their lobbying activity frequently results in the creation of legislation that safeguards workers' rights, imposes minimum wage requirements, and establishes guidelines for working conditions.

Social Justice and equality: Trade unions support social justice and equality by promoting fair treatment and better working conditions. They fight to protect vulnerable employees from exploitation, minimise economic gaps, and advance inclusion.

Strikes and Collective Action: Trade unions have the authority to organise employees and carry out collective action—such as rallies and strikes—to voice their complaints and demands. These activities may pressure employers and governments to handle labour concerns productively. Trade unions also influence policies about

employment and the economy. They negotiate with governments and businesses to create policies that affect labour markets, unemployment, and economic development.

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Trade unions push for enhanced social security policies, such as health insurance, pensions, and other welfare programmes, to promote the general well-being of employees and their families.

Training and skill development: Some trade unions try to provide their members with training and skill development programmes, improving their employability. **Social Security and Welfare:** To promote the well-being of employees and their families, trade unions push for better social security policies, such as health benefits, pensions, and other welfare programmes.

Skills Development and Training: Some trade unions try to provide their members with skill development and training programmes, improving their employability and giving them the tools they need to navigate shifting employment markets.

Trade unions frequently participate in politics to influence legislation and government by sponsoring politicians or parties that share their views.

➤ *Trade Union and Scico- Economic development*

Social Security and Welfare: Trade unions advocate for more robust social security policies, such as health benefits, pensions, and other welfare programmes, to advance the overall well-being of workers and their families.

Skills Development and Training: Some trade unions try to provide their members with programming that will improve their employability and equip them with the skills they need to navigate changing job markets successfully.

To influence legislation and the government, trade unions regularly engage in political activity, for example, by endorsing candidates or parties that reflect their viewpoints.

Regional and International Cooperation: Trade unions in South Asia collaborate with labour groups from other countries to address cross-border labour issues and advance workers' rights in regional and international forums.

The Distribution of Trade union membership and changes since 2000 in various developed and developing nations. There are two messages. The proportion of employees who are union members, which is the traditional measure of union density, is not significantly different across the four country groups at various stages of development. There is little correlation between union density rates and income levels as expressed by per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), both internationally and over time. When a

country is or becomes richer, union density rates do not rise (Jelle Visser, 2019).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Bhattacharya, D., & Rahman, K. A. (2018)) This article gave a general overview of trade union potential and difficulties in South Asian nations, focusing on India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It talks about how political affiliations, regulatory barriers, and globalisation influence trade union activity and examines the tactics used by unions to deal with new issues.

(Ghosh, J, 2020) looked at trade unions' impact on South Asia's economic growth, highlighting its benefits for social welfare, inclusive growth, and labour market dynamics. It compares the union movements in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India and emphasises the value of collective bargaining for protecting workers' rights.

(Hussian, M 2019) examined the role of trade unions in the economic development of South Asia, emphasising their advantages for social welfare, inclusive growth, and labour market dynamics. The importance of collective bargaining for defending workers' rights was stressed as the union movements in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India were contrasted.

(Kapoor, V., & Desai, S. 2017) This case study examined trade union setup and membership trends in India and Nepal. It examines unions' difficulties in bringing together ad hoc and sporadic employees and suggests tactics to increase their membership density.

(Mahmud, et, al. 2019) They examined the function of trade unions in advancing social justice and workers' rights, focusing on Bangladesh's garment industry. It evaluated trade unions' difficulties in the apparel industry and how they affect working conditions and labour relations.

This empirical investigation investigates the connection between trade unionism and economic development in South Asian nations. It examines how trade unions affect investment choices, labour productivity, and financial stability.

(Rahman, S. 2019) The potential for regional trade union collaboration in South Asia was examined in this study. To solve cross-border labour concerns and advance social justice in the area, it analyses the obstacles to cross-border union collaboration and its prospects.

(Yadav et al., 2019) The study examined the function of trade unions in providing social support and protection to Nepali migrant workers working abroad in South Asian nations. It draws attention to the difficulties these employees confront and trade unions' work to protect their rights and well-being.

➤ Objectives

- To research the beginnings, progression, and significant turning points in a few South Asian nations in the history of trade unions.
- To evaluate the effect and impact of trade unions on South Asian labour laws, regulations, and worker protection while considering social justice and economic growth.
- To list the obstacles trade unions in South Asia must overcome, such as anti-union laws, restrictions, and opposition from employers, and to provide solutions.
- To investigate the effects of trade unions on South Asia's socioeconomic development, particularly their contributions to social welfare, dynamic labour markets, and inclusive growth.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research will start with a thorough assessment of the literature to find relevant studies, papers, academic articles, and other materials about trade unions in South Asia. Understanding the historical history of trade unions, their organisational structures, functions, difficulties, and impact on socioeconomic growth will be based on the literature review.

Data collection: Key stakeholders, such as trade union leaders, employees, government officials, employers, and labour studies specialists, will be interviewed individually and in focus groups to gather qualitative data. These conversations and interviews will shed light on the condition of trade unions today, their tactics, and the difficulties they confront.

Secondary Data: Quantitative information will be gathered from secondary sources such as government publications, international organisation reports, and official labour statistics. This information will examine trends in South Asian socioeconomic development, union membership, and labour market indices.

Comparative study: A comparative analysis will determine how trade union movements in the chosen nations compare and contrast. This investigation will clarify regional patterns and how different socioeconomic and political environments affect unions.

Data Analysis: To find repeating themes, new ones, and viewpoints on trade unions, qualitative data from focus groups and interviews will be thematically analysed. Statistical methods will analyse quantitative data to find patterns and connections between socioeconomic development and labour market dynamics.

Based on the research's results, policy suggestions will be developed to address trade unions' difficulties and improve their function in advancing social justice and fostering socioeconomic growth in South Asia.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study of trade unions in South Asia has shed light on their historical development, function, difficulties, and effects on the socioeconomic growth of the region. The results show that trade unions have exerted tremendous influence over labour policy and promoted social justice while fighting for workers' rights. Through collective bargaining and agreements, trade unions have gotten higher pay, better working conditions, and more social welfare for employees in various industries. The report emphasises that trade unions in South Asia have experienced several difficulties, such as anti-union practices, legislative restrictions, and employer hostility. However, they have been able to advocate for workers' rights and encourage inclusive economic growth because of their tenacity and flexibility. To achieve equal socioeconomic development, it is also crucial to meet the needs of marginalised and disadvantaged employees, such as women, migrants, and those employed in the informal sector. Overall, the study shows that trade unions in South Asia continue to be crucial players in the fight for social justice and socioeconomic advancement. For a society to be more just and equitable, their contributions to better working conditions, labour rights, and inclusive growth are essential.

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