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Research Paper Economics



Employer-Employee Relationship In Co-Operation

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ABSTRACT

This is a descriptive paper explaining Employer-Employee Relationship in Co-operation, which is divided in 4 parts namely - 1.Birth of Co-operation 2.Employer-Employee Relationship in Co-operatives 3.Employment and Co-operative Principles 4.Employer-Employee Relations in Indian Co-operatives. In any co-operative activity, employer-employee relationship plays a crucial role because success of co-operative activity as the name indicated depends on co-operation between employee and employer. In co-operative societies, an employer is said to be his own employee. The workers are themselves the owners of the institution. They subscribe to its share capital, assume responsibilities and undertake risks. They are, therefore, expected to realize that any undue increase in the cost of produc¬tion may lead to a collapse of the society itself. On the other hand, any earnings made by the society are meant for nobody other than the mem¬bers. In Co-operation there is, thus, an amalgamation of varied interests which results in the extinction of conflict. In this regard, the present paper attempts to reflect impact of employer -employee relationship in success of co-operative activity.

Differences between the employers and employees arose mostly during the Industrial Revolution, when exploitation of the labour class forced it to think of methods to counteract the exploiting forces. Since then there has generally been unrest among the working classes. This unrest often culminated into an open conflict with the employers. The workers organized their own trade unions and other such bodies in order to bargain collectively for higher wages and better conditions of work. By now, this conflict has become a permanent feature of democratic economies.

In order to resolve the differences which led to this sort of conflict and to redress the genuine grievances of the workers, various Laws have been made by the government. The maximum numbers of hours of work have been fixed, minimum wages have been determined and security of service-has been guaranteed under certain conditions. A system of inspecting the conditions of work has been introduced and provision for the grant of disability and old-age pensions has been made. The employers are now required to give funds for the welfare of the workers and their families and the scheme of compulsory insurance has been introduced. In; spite of all these measures, the relationship between the employers and the employees sometimes becomes strained.

1.Birth of Co-operation :

Birth of co-operation can be attributed to the existence of unfair and dishonest dealings. It is a force which aims at the eradication of malpractices. Its ways are, however, different. It does not believe in entering into conflict with others. It was introduced when the method of strife and violence proved to be ineffective. It teaches the workers to by-pass the arena of struggle and collectively set up their own units of production and distribution and thus give better facilities to themselves. It was with this idea that the industrial workers: of England, farmers of Canada, laborers of Italy, etc., organized their co-operative 'societies which aimed at the self-employment of their members and the creation of better conditions for them.

2.Employer-Employee Relationship in Co-operatives :

In developed countries, the co-operatives own very big units of production and distribution. The consumers' co-operative societies of England for example, employ more than 2,75,000 workers whose pay bill comes to £4,789 millions. They are thus dealing with problems of personnel management on a large scale. Still the relationship between the societies and employees has generally been cordial. The conditions of work have been better and wages reasonable. Night work has been abolished, working hours have been shortened, continuous employment has been assured and workshops have been made healthy and wholesome places of work. On the whole, the condition of labor is better in co-operative units than in other concerns in the country. The societies encourage their employees to become members of their trade union. They frequently consult the trade unions concerned before fixing wages and determining other conditions of service. In case of dispute every effort is made to settle it by negotiations. For this purpose the societies have built up an elaborate system of conciliation and consultation. A National Co-operative Board has been set-up. It consists of six representatives of co-operative societies, six representatives of the trade unions and one independent chairman. The disputes which cannot be settled at lower level are referred to this Board and its decision is final and binding on both parties.

In Sweden also the consumer's co-operatives are employing a large number of persons. In 2010, the retail societies and the K F had 98,750 employees on their pay-rolls and were the biggest employers next to the State. The condition of labor in these societies is also very good and their relations are cordial. The societies had introduced the 8-hours day in 1905, whereas it was, introduced in the country's private sector by legislation in 1919. Similar, the two-week holiday scheme was introduced in the societies in 1907, whereas it was introduced in private enterprise in 1938. In 1946 the Co-operative Union declared that wages and other conditions of labor in the co-operatives would on no account be inferior to those prevailing in the private enterprise.

The co-operatives of this country also have elaborate arrangements for conciliation. In 1942 art organization named K F O was-set up to serve as a mediator for settling disputes between the co-operatives and their employees. Reasons for this cordiality-are not far to seek. They may be found in the ideology and history of the movement itself. Firstly, the co-operative movement was started by persons of limited means, belonging to the exploited class and as such has a sympathetic heart towards the workers. Secondly, recruitment is generally confined to members who fully realize that any unreasonable demand on their part may harm the institution itself, of which they are the owners. Thirdly, the employees are sometimes represented on the managing bodies and have got a chance to put forth and fully discuss their points of view. Mutual understanding is thus promoted and chances of conflict are reduced. Fourthly, in joint stock companies, the employees consider themselves too superior to mix up with the laborers and it is this aloofness which often create^ a gulf in their relations. In co-operative sector this feeling is absent because workers are closer to, the management and there is better understanding between the two. Lastly, disputes in co-operatives are decided through arbitration.

3.Employment and Co-operative Principles :
The principle of co-operation, which governs the relationship between the different interests involved is' "Equity" or "Proportionality". Cooperative societies, like other well-managed business concerns, earn some profit. It is at the distribution stage that the co-operatives follow a different .policy. In capitalistic set-up surplus goes to the organizers and capitalists and in socialistic concerns, it goes to the State. In co-operative societies none of the factors of production is allowed to get an upper hand over the other. Surplus goes to all in fair proportion. There is, therefore, very little chance left for them to raise any point of dispute.

In co-operative societies, an employer is said to be his own employee. The workers are themselves the owners of the institution. They subscribe to its share capital, assume responsibilities and undertake risks. They are, therefore, expected to realize that any undue increase in the cost of production may lead to a collapse of the society itself. On the other hand, any earnings made by the society are meant for nobody other than the members. In Co-operation there is, thus, an amalgamation of varied interests which results in the extinction of conflict. In industrial societies, for example, only workers form the general body. Similarly, in labor and construction societies and fanning societies, the owners are the workers themselves. Members are, therefore; complexly free to settle their own problems and the question of dispute does not arise.

What is said above is however, not true of every cooperative society. Societies may, in this respect, be classified as:

(a) Societies of the employers alone such as individual societies in which the only interest represented is that of workers.
(b) Societies for the welfare of the employees. Such societies may be organized by the employees in particular concerns in order to safeguard their interests and provide amenities.
(c) Societies of employers and employees both, e.g., co-operative sugar mills and other processing units.

It is in the societies of the last mentioned type that we find the growers and laborers brought together. Growers are interested in getting better price for their produce, whereas the workers are interested in getting more wages. Each would, thus, try to get the lion's share even at the cost of other. Tendency of such preference may, therefore, sometimes result in a dispute. The co-operative theory which, so very well applies to societies with homogeneous interests, applies but with lesser efficacy to societies of the type mentioned above. Co-operatives are thus, not perfect absorbers of employer-employee disputes, but are certainly the best system to minimize the shock.

4.Employer-Employee Relations in Indian Co-operatives :
Till only a few years back the size of co-operative societies in India was generally small. Business of the cooperative societies at primary level was being carried on by honorary workers; Number of employees in secondary societies was also small. Even though the aggregate number of employees in the cooperative sector was faulty large, they were too scattered to organize unions for collective bargaining.

In the recent past the size of cooperative societies as well as their business has grown many folds. During 2009-10, co-operative societies of all types paid an amount of Rs. 975 crores by way of, salaries to the staff. The number of employees during that year was estimated to be about 29.4 millions in the whole country. In fact co-operative sector is growing into one of the biggest employers in the country.

However, the relationship of the employees with the employers in the co-operative sector in India cannot be said to be ideal. A study conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences Bombay brought out that "even though a few of these (Co-operative) units employ a large number of workers, the employer-employee relationship is still largely paternalistic.

Wage scales are unilaterally fixed by the employers who deny incantive payments and other allowances. Discipline is maintained by informal orders from the management and service rule are not followed. Recruitment, fixation of wages, terms of service, welfare facilities and all such matters are management prerogatives....."

Another study conducted by the Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Co-operative Management Poona also revealed that "there was no channel for smooth, easy communication between the management and the employees, no specifically laid down procedure for redressing their grievances, no attempts at career development had been made, compensation was unrelated to the job contents and the individuals' productivity and training facilities were lacking. The expectations of the employees such as good treatment, job security and removal of grievances, had not been met in any substantial measure and employees are not allowed to join the co-operatives as members." The study further revealed that im 75% cases the employees were not allowed to become members of the co-operative societies; in 95% cases the employees were not allowed to become Directors; Welfare measures were largely overlooked; and 65% of societies had no trade unions. The study also brought out that in very few cases the employees resorted to strikes. There was only one strike on one day in one central bank since 1966-67, in which 16 employees took part. In processing units there were five strikes since 2009-10 in which 1785 persons took part. In co-operative stores, strikes were at the maximum, totaling 366 work days since 2009-10, in which 2750 persons took part.

The need for a cordial employer-employee relationship is obvious. In fact the success of an organization depends to a great extent on whether the employees willingly give their best and respond effectively to the demands of the employers.

Sometimes co-operative societies demand an exemption from the application of Labour Laws to them. The demand is based on the argument that as the very ideology of co-operation is against exploitation and malpractices, there is no necessity for any legislative action with regard to them. There, however, seems to be no force in this argument. Co-operatives aim at giving better terms to the worker and creating ideal conditions for them to work. In such a case, the question of fearing the Labour Laws does not arise. Moreover in societies in which there is a very small community of interest between the employers and the employees, the Labor Laws must safeguard the interests of-the workers. The demand, therefore, seems to be merely a part of the general tendency of co-operative societies in India to seek concessions from the Government and is not based on genuine difficulties. However, a relaxation in Labour Laws may be considered in case of such societies as may satisfy the following conditions :

1.The employees in the cooperative societies should be their won employees in the real sense and there should be a complete homogeneity of interest between the two,
2.No non-member worker should be employed by the cooperative society.
3.The cooperative society should submit to inspection by labor officers who may see that the concessions are not being misused.
Even then, the relaxation-should be within limits. Complete exemption cannot be justified.

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