

A STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN TEA INDUSTRY OF ASSAM: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JORHAT DISTRICT OF ASSAM.

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Abstract: The Industrial Disputes Act is such an act in which disputes provide elaborate machinery to resolve the disputes between the workers and management. Poor industrial relations often culminate to industrial unrest/ disputes. They manifest in the form of go-slow, gheraos, bandh, strikes, lockouts, etc. The common consequences of industrial disputes are loss of production, loss of profit, and even closure of units. The term of 'industrial dispute' means "any dispute or difference between employers' employers or between employers and workmen, or between workmen and workmen, which is connected with the employment or non-employment or the terms of employment and conditions of employment of any person" Causes of industrial disputes can be divided into economic and non-economic. Economic causes of industrial disputes are wages, employee dismissal and retrenchment, bonus, working conditions and hours of works and other reasons of disputes which includes medical, educational facilities, housing facilities for the workers is also a cause of dispute. Wages has been the major economic reason causing industrial disputes. Non- economic causes of industrial disputes are non-recognition of unions, poor leadership, political leadership, partial treatment by superiors, political environment and absence of grievance redressal procedure etc.

Key Words: .Wages and allowances, Bonus, Retrenchment, poor Working Condition, Political interference, Mutual Negotiations etc.

Introduction:

Assam is famous all over the world for tea. The name Assam is synonymous to the best liquoring quality black tea in the world. The tea industry in India is one of the oldest and well organized industries and it plays an important role in the national economy. It is the most important industry in Assam as elsewhere in the country. The Industrial Disputes Act 1947 is such an act in which disputes provide elaborate machinery to resolve the disputes between the workers and management. Poor industrial relations often culminate to industrial unrest/ disputes. They manifest in the form of go-slow, gheraos, bandh, strikes, lockouts, etc.

Causes of Industrial Disputes:

There are many causes of industrial disputes that are rooted in political, historical and socio-economic variables and behavioral factors. Causes of industrial disputes can be divided into economic and non-economic. Economic causes of industrial disputes are wages, employee dismissal and retrenchment, bonus, working conditions and hours of works and other reasons of disputes which includes medical, educational facilities, housing facilities for the workers is also a cause of dispute. Wages has been the major economic reason causing industrial disputes. Non- economic causes of industrial disputes are non-recognition of unions, poor leadership, political leadership, partial treatment by superiors, political environment and absence of grievance redressal procedure etc.

Objectives of the study:

- 1.To study the major causes of industrial dispute in tea industry of Assam.
- 2.To promote measures for securing and preserving amity and good relations between employers and

employees.

3.To offer suggestive measures to minimize the issues among the tea garden workers.

Review of Literature:

Mohanani (1999) in his article entitled “Some Aspects of Industrial Relations since New Economic Policy” stated that in India, the managements consider the trade unions to be a necessary evil of the industrial system, while trade unions consider that challenging and opposing the decisions of the management constitute their main task. The scope for collective bargaining was considered to be very weak owing to the basic disagreement in the view points of the political parties who controlled the different unions. The ideological orientation of most of the Indian trade unions was highly conservative as compared to the moderate approaches of the European and American trade unions. However, since the adoption of the economic reforms, radical changes have taken place, and the approach has moved towards co-operation from that of confrontation.

Ratnam (2001) found in his study entitled “Globalization and Labour Management Relations- Dynamics of change” that traditionally, wages and working condition were under the domain of collective bargaining. Over the years, however, anything and everything has come under the purview of collective bargaining, such as staffing arrangements, workforce and composition, work norms, incentives and overtime payments, job and income security arrangements, technology and other changes, working tools techniques and practices, staff mobility including transfers and promotions, rewards and punishment, individual grievances, discipline matters and the like. In fact, everything-from recruitment to post-retirement benefits have become a part and parcel of negotiations.

According to the Report of the Second National Commission on Labour (1999): The new mindset that the new context calls for must be reflected in all attitudes and activities, industries relations or employers-employee relationship. All efforts must be made to promote bilateralism based on mutual interest and universally accepted fundamental right and norms. Where differences persist, the law must be enabled, contending views to be settled through mediation and arbitration, including compulsory arbitration where a dispute may lead to disruption of social life affecting public health, sanitation, drinking water, supply of medical facilities and transport, and cause suffering to a large section of the people who are unrelated to disputes.

Bose (2011) said that job characteristics – such as safety and welfare measures, incentives, promotional opportunity, task clarity and significance, transport facilities and skills utilization characteristics such as commitment and relationship with supervisors and co- workers- have a significant effect on job satisfaction.

The “objectionable remarks” made by the supervisor against employee triggered violence at Maruti’s Manesar Plant on July 21, 2012. Workers at the plant turned violent, attacking and injuring executives and managers in the office premises. The attackers also set fire to the property and damaged facilities. They blocked the exit gates and held the executives’ hostage. The Maruti management claimed that it tried to resolve the issue amicably, but during the talks, the workers allegedly attacked the members of the senior management, executives and managers. This version was contested by the union. Sarabjeet Singh; general secretary of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) said “The supervisor made objectionable remarks against a permanent worker who belongs to the Schedule Caste category. When we opposed it, they misbehaved with us and suspended the Worker” Maruti Suzuki declared an indefinite lock out at its Manesar plant. This incident explicitly shows the antagonist attitude between the management. The cause for dispute and unrest is the absence of harmonious relationship between the management and the managed.

Haber and Levinson (1956) designed a study of labour relations and productivity in the building trades’. They found that the labour relations pattern in the building trades differs materially from that perfected

in other industries. The only suggestion to improve the labour relations in the building trades is the progress in assuring steady employment.

Saxena (1964) in his study entitled, 'Industrial Relations in five Industrial Units of Meerut District' has brought to the forefront the fact that the problems of industrial relations should not be tackled merely on the economic front. These are sociological problems depending for their solution on the mutual trust and confidence among the workers and the employers.

Singh (1966) in his published doctoral thesis entitled, 'Labour Management in Sugar Industry' has observed that there is no initiative on the part of employers willfully (excepting legal obligations) to provide welfare facilities to workers.

Nair (1973) conducted case studies to ascertain the labour management relations in Kerala. He pointed out rich diversity in the pattern and composition of labour management relations that prevail in the state. It shows that Kerala has forged ahead in the matter of evolving a system of labour management relations, which can well be a guide and model for the rest of India.

Das (1983) in his research makes an intensive study of industrial relations in six textile mills of Indore. He found that industrial relations are sociological problems, depending for their solution on the mutual understanding between the operative and managerial staff.

Chand (1989) designed a study of industrial relations in the public sector in Andhra Pradesh. He suggested uniformity in the wage structure of all public sector units in the Andhra Pradesh (to reduce many labour problems).

Research Gap

From the foregoing review of literature it can be understood that though many studies have been conducted on different aspects of industrial disputes in India and even in foreign countries, a study specifically for industrial disputes in tea industry of Assam is missing in literature. Similarly, no study has made a comparative analysis of degree of satisfaction among the employees of public, private and government owned tea industry of Assam. Moreover, till date, no research has been conducted on any aspects of industrial disputes in tea estates sampled for this study. Hence, the present study examines empirically the vital issues affecting the relationship between labour and management in selected tea estates of Jorhat District of Assam and suggests measures to make them more effective contributions for the productivity and prosperity of tea estates of Assam.

Research Methodology:

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were collected from the sample respondents. For this purpose, two separate comprehensive interview schedules were prepared; (1) for the workers and (2) for the management personnel. The schedules for the workers were designed to seek data on the workers' socio-economic background, their attitudes regarding the causes of disputes, and mode of settlement of disputes in tea industry of Assam.

The interview schedule for the management personnel was designed to elicit information regarding the perception/ views of the management personnel on the causes and settlement of disputes. As the interview schedule included both positive and negative statements. It facilitated an inbuilt mechanism to reduce the weightage of inconsistent and contradictory responses. The interview schedules were pre-tested with the workers and management personnel in one of the units in each category.

Secondary data has been collected from the Journals, books, published and unpublished theses, internet and newspapers etc.

Sample size: 13 number tea gardens have been selected from the total tea garden of 130 no's of jorhat district of Assam and 10 number workers have been selected from the sample tea garden in the study area. Hence, the total respondents have been 130. Two number of management personnel have been selected from each sample tea garden in the study area.

Statistical Tools: The researchers stated analyzing the data manually with the help of calculator.

Statistical tools such as percentage analysis and Chi-Square test and choice based ranking were employed to draw inferences.

Result and Discussion:

WORKERS PERCEPTION ON CAUSES OF DISPUTES:

Table:1.1: Major Causes for Disputes as perceived by Workers:

	No of respondents 130	
	Agree	Disagree
Wages and allowances	70%	30%
Bonus	90%	10%
Poor Working Conditions	30%	70%
Retrenchment	66%	34%
Political interference	25%	75%
Absence of grievance redressal procedure etc.	60%	40%
Others	77%	23%

Source: Field Study.

The Table 1.1 reveals that there was uniformity in the viewpoint of the workers in the study area. Workers considered bonus issue as 90% and followed by wages and allowances 70%, Retrenchment 66% and absence of grievance redressal procedure etc.

Management personnel’s Perception on the causes of Disputes:

Table: 1.2: Major Causes for Disputes as perceived by the managerial personnel

	No of respondents 26	
	Agree	Disagree
Wages and allowances	80%	20%
Bonus	90%	10%
Poor Working Conditions	60%	40%
Retrenchment	80%	20%
Political interference	25%	75%
Absence of grievance redressal procedure etc.	80%	20%
Others	70%	30%

Source: Field Study.

The table 1.2 reveals that there was uniformity in the viewpoints of the managerial personnel in the study area. It is seen that 90% managerial personnel expressed bonus issue is the first cause of disputes and followed by wages and allowances 80%, Retrenchment 80% respectively.

Desired Mode of Disputes Settlement:

This section analyses the workers’ and managerial personnel’s perceptions on the various modes of dispute settlement. In all, four different methods of dispute settlement were chosen and the respondents were asked them to reply these according to their preference. To understand the methods of settlement of disputes in their order of importance, a percentage analysis was used.

Table: 1.3: Workers’ Perception of Desired forms of settlement of disputes.

	No of Respondents 130	
	Agreed	Disagreed
Mutual Negotiations	80%	20%
Conciliation	60%	40%
Adjudication	55%	45%
Arbitration	43%	57%

Source: Field Study.

The table 1.3 indicates that the workers in the study area had identical viewpoints regarding the various methods of settlement of disputes in tea estates in jorhat District. It is seen that 80% workers considered that mutual Negotiation was the desired forms of settlement of disputes and followed by Conciliation (60%), Adjudication (55%) and arbitration (43%) respectively in order of importance.

Table1.4: Desired forms of settlement of disputes as perceived by managerial personnel

	No of respondents 26	
	Agreed	Disagreed
Mutual Negotiations	90%	10%
Conciliation	88%	22%
Adjudication	56%	35%
Arbitration	53%	47%

Source: Field Study.

The table 1.4 shows that the managerial personnel’s perceptions of the desired forms of settlement of dispute. It shows that the management personnel in the tea estates had identical perceptions with regard to the mode of settlement of disputes in the study area. They assigned 90% on mutual negotiation and followed by Conciliation on (88%), Adjudication on (56%) and Arbitration on (53%) respectively in the study area

Major findings of the study:

Workers considered bonus issue as 90% and followed by wages and allowances 70%, Retrenchment 66% and absence of grievance redressal procedure etc.

90% managerial personnel expressed bonus issue is the first cause of disputes and followed by wages and allowances 78%, Retrenchment 80% respectively.

Negative attitude of the management towards unions and unwillingness to recognize the rights of the workers to form unions and exploitation of unions and workers by political leaders for their personal gains respectively. The impact of other factors was found to be negligible in influencing the industrial disputes in tea industry in Assam.

80% workers considered that mutual Negotiation was the desired forms of settlement of disputes and followed by Conciliation (60%), Adjudication (55%) and arbitration (43%) respectively in order of importance.

The perception of the managerial personnel in the two sectors with regard to the factors indicates that inter-union rivalry was the most important factor in influencing disputes in both the private and the govt. tea estates. However, the managerial personnel in the two sectors had different viewpoints with regard to the other factors which have an influence on industrial disputes in tea industry in Assam.

Suggestions:

The management and trade unions should make the payment of bonus to the workers according to their demands to minimize the dispute as it is the one of the most important cause of industrial unrest.

The management should pay the wages and allowances according to wages act 1948 to the workers in time so that the workers would work hard and soul for increasing the productivity.

Political interference in trade unionism should be eradicated.

The grievance redressal procedure should be well established and known to the workers to minimize the industrial unrest.

The disputes should be settled through mutual negotiation to the extent possible instead of going through a lawful procedure as most of the workers find it at ease and the management too finds it as the best measure of settlement.

The management should settle the amount of gratuity in time or within six month so that the retired workers run their life comfortably after retirement from the service.

The performance of industrial relation department should be improved as in case of private owned tea estates the workers are not satisfied by their way of settlement.

Conclusion:

The resultant squeeze in employment, wages, bonus, and benefits create a sense of helpless and result in disputes in industrial setup. Hence, the following guidelines will help for developing good relations between the management and workers.

If all attempts of conciliation fail, adjudication should be sought for by voluntary reference rather than by compulsory reference.

Even if the difference has developed itself into a dispute, it would be desirable to secure its settlement by negotiations between the two concerned parties.

In the adjustment of differences between the labor and management, the best course would be to prevent the differences from developing into disputes.

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