

Evolution and Growth of Service Organisations in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

An associated life play a very important role in fulfilling the goal of group interest and promotes co-operation and harmony. The formation of Trade Unions is the noted examples of well arranged organisations in society. The Trade Unions exist to project the general demands of workers and help them to improve their political, social and economic conditions. However, trade unionism was generally prevalent among industrial and factory workers even before independent. Later, the government employees were also prompted to establish unions to acquire their demands and aspirations. The government employees are known as ‘the civil servants’ or administrators who execute the functions of government. They are the service providers, and their function is to act as the agents who connect government and the people. The employees have several demands connected with transfer, promotion, better salary and service conditions.

INTRODUCTION

The government employees form the service organisations to acquire these demands. The unionism of government employees are accepted in every democratic state. The employees have the right to work, right to make association, right to organise, right to strike and do collective bargaining. But in a wider sense, government servants are those officers who are working as full time government staffs, and earn their lively-hood through the remunerations given in the form of government salary. In this sense, their organisations are identified as ‘public employees’ organisations’. Like trade unions, they have a say in policy matters especially concerning their demands like pay reform, better service conditions and benefits. However, the major distinction between the government service organisations and trade unions is, that, the trade unions are found in industrial sectors and factories, whereas the service organisations are visible in administrative system. Since they are professional associations, they are seen in government departments. Similarly, the wages of industrial workers are determined by the method of collective bargaining, but the salary of the public servants is fixed by the Pay Commissions appointed by the government. As a member of an organisation, the role of an employee is to promote a feeling of solidarity and comradeship among the workers. The organisation also enables the employees to protect and improve the working conditions, status and their material welfare. Further, the membership in the public service union is encouraged on the ground that, the association is required not only to promote good employee-employer relations, but are essential for effective negotiation on pay, transfer, promotion, recruitment and other employment benefits.

Prime focus of this article is the genesis and growth of government employees organisations in Kerala. The social and political consciousness combined with the miserable conditions of the workers in the 19 th and 20 th centuries has given rise to the establishment of the service organizations in Kerala. The article also examines about the historical efforts of the leaders of various employees organisations to build a strong and caliber organisations to fulfill the demands and needs of workers in the State. The methodology of this article is both historical and descriptive.

GENERAL VIEW OF WHITE COLAR ORGANISATIONS:

The white collar organisations are the government employees organisations working in service sector. Hence they are known as 'service organisations'. To Bain, the service organisations consist of the members of the administrative, scientific, technical, clerical and professional employees (Bain, 1948). According to the government servant's conduct rules 1960, "service association" means a combination of government employees formed in to a lawful organised body with the objects of securing and promoting conditions of service, common interest and legitimate demands of its members, Inculcating the sense of cooperation, friendliness and fraternity among its members, Carrying on general welfare activities for the well-being of its members. As per the service rule, the service associations include union, federation and confederation or coordination of employees (Sreemandir, 2004). They are the groups of employees working in the government service, formed for the purpose of protection of the interests of their members.

Richard B. Freeman referred public service union as the more craft like and white collar unions working in public sector (Freeman, 1986). Majority of unions are known by its name related to their craft. eg. Teacher's union, Nurse's union, Fire fighter's union, Police union etc. The craft-like structure of employees are more popular in public sector than other sector, and the white collar membership of employees are comparatively higher in public service. Perhaps, the dominance of clerical employees have contributed to the growth of white collar membership in the public service organisations. Besides this, the employees in the public sector are a significant voting block in which the politicians are much interested. Unlike the private sector unions or industrial unions, the unionism in government sector operates under several constraints and is very different from that of private service unions. A major contributor to the growth of public sector unions are the rapid spread of legislations and executive rulings which gave rise to the state and local government employees' right to organise and bargain collectively. As the employment grew in state and local government, the younger and more militant workers in the work force were mounted (Mickle, 1919). Unlike the industrial or private sector unions, the public service organisations have substantial political views and pressure, especially at local level. Lobbying and other political activities by the public service organisations are considered as important tools to increase pay and other employment benefits and in general to increase public expenditure in the areas of public service (Brien, 1962). Moreover whereas the strikes of industrial or private sector unions are economic weapons, the strikes of public service organisations are political tool to raise their demands. The relevant cause of the strike of public employees is political. Their strikes involve gathering of public support behind employees and their unions to force public officials to make concessions (Crig, 1980).

A peculiar feature of the public service organisations is that, these are constituted by government employees who are not permitted to participate in political and trade union activities. Thus while engaging in union activities; the government employees must seek permission from the government. In India, even before independence various rules were made by the British government promulgated several decrees to regulate the conducts of its employees. The East India Company Act of 1770, 1793 and 1797, the Sale Of Office Act 1809, the Government Of India Act 1833, the Supreme Court Of Officers Act 1859, the Indian Penal Code 1860, the Police Act 1861, the Administrator General's Act 1874 etc., passed during those years were the basis of the official orders for regulating the conduct of employees (Sukomal Sen, 2006). It was for the first time, in 1890, the orders of Governor General to regulate the activities of government employees were

issued in council. The orders stated that, “a government servant may not take part in any political agitation or meeting, or attend any political meeting, his presence at which is likely to be misconstrued or to impair his public usefulness. When there is room for doubt whether any action which a government proposes to take will contravene the provisions of this rule, he should refer the matter for orders to the local government or to his immediate superior officer” (Punnekkar, 1969). In 1904, the government framed a set of rules known as the Government Servant's Conduct Rule 1904, and the rules were made applicable to both central and provincial government employees. The rules were modified by giving it a reactionary character-prohibiting meeting in public place, and procession and strike by the government employees (Giri, 1974). After independence, the Central Government framed the rules and regulations connected with the recognition of the service associations in 1959 which is known as the Central Civil Service Rule for the Recognition of Service Associations, 1959.

ACCORDING TO THIS RULE, A SERVICE ASSOCIATION MAY BE RECOGNISED ON THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

- No person who is not a government servant is connected with the affairs of the association.
- The executive of the association is appointed from amongst the members only.
- The association shall not espouse or support the cause of the individual government servant; and
- It shall not maintain any political funds or lend itself to propagation of the views of any political party or politician (Varma and Mukherjee, 1974). More over, part 1 and part 2 of the section 4 of the Central Civil Service Conduct Rules deal with the conditions of government employees.
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Section 4 says that, “no person in government service shall be a member or otherwise be associated with political parties or any organisation which takes part in any politics, nor shall take part or to subscribe or to assist in any manner any other political movement or activity”. Section 4-a: “no government servant shall participate in any demonstration or strike in connection with the matter pertaining to the conditions of service”. Section 4-b: “no government servant shall join or continue to be a member of any service association of government servants which has not within a period of six months from its formation, obtained the recognition of the government under the rules prescribed in that behalf, recognition in respect of which has been refused or withdrawn by the government under the said rule”. However, these rules to a great extent have curtailed the democratic and political rights of government employees. With the active interference of organisations in the determination of pay and allowances have brought reforms in service benefits of government employees.

EMERGENCE OF EMPLOYEES ORGANISATIONS IN INDIA:

In India the government employees' associations originated in the first decades of the 20th century. The Indian Telegraph Association (ITA) which was born in 1906, may be considered as the first association of this category. The association was able to secure a pay hike for employees from Rs.40/- to Rs.50/- per month. The success of ITA to secure monetary gains for its employees induced the postal employees to form the Bombay Postal Union in 1907 (Sing, 1968). These preliminary efforts of government employees to form their organisation gave inspirations for other government employees to organise them in to unions during the period following the World War I. The post war economic crises and the October Socialist Revolution in Russia have impelled and inspired government employees to come together for collective actions with a view to resisting the

deteriorating economic conditions. Being terribly hard-hit by the after effects of the war, the government employees began to realise the folly of standing aloof and soon there grew up a number of unions and associations. Between the years 1918-1920, the employees of the Currency Office, the Accountant General's Office, the Income Tax Office, etc., have formed their Department-wise or Office-wise unions (Karnik, 1966). In 1925, the All India Railway Men's Association was born. The Bank employees were the significant contributors of forming early unionism in the Indian Public Service. In the state level also, the employees associations grew up in this period. Both the Bengal Ministerial Staff Association and the Madras NGO Association were organised in 1921 and 1924. The process of unionism was very active among the lower level employees between 1920 and 1940. This is because of the fact that, the lower level employees faced several problems at that time. They were ill-considered and were often misbehaved by their superior officers. Further, they were not given better pay and employment benefits. Sukomal Sen says, "the white collar employees in India in the pre-independence period acted as the instruments of colonial government to carry out the exploitation policies. Since they are governed by the rules and regulations in the post-independence periods too, they cannot be effectively organised and hence they are not able to bring the main stream revolution of proletariat" (Sukomal Sen, 2007).

In the post-independence period, all employees working under central and state governments have their own unions and associations with the support of political parties. The bank employees, the postal employees, the railway employees, the insurance employees etc., have formed separate unions to achieve their goals and demands. However, in 1960, the foundation was laid down to form a vast association to represent the central government and state government employees' organisations and consequently, in 1966, the All India State Government Employees Federation (AISGEF) was established with a view to achieve goals and objectives of government employees working at the centre and in the state level. It consists of the government employees associations as well as the trade unions of various industry. It focuses on the needs to establish trade union rights for government employees and other industrial unions. It also consider that, the government employees are a part of working class and to acquire long term benefits, a joint struggle of trade unions and employees associations are necessary(AISGEF Logo, 1967). Various organisations of central government employees such as the Bank Employees Union (BEU), the All India Insurance Employees' Union (AIIU), the Regional Bank Employees Association (RBA), the State Bank Employees Union (SBEU), the Indian Postal Union (IPEU) and the NGO organisations working at various states were merged with this federation.

GROWTH OF SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN KERALA:

In Kerala, the formation of trade union was first appeared in various industrial sectors and gradually, it gained momentum in the plantation sector. The rapid spread of leftist and socialist ideas influenced the workers in industrial sectors to come together and form trade unions to achieve their goals and demands (Prakasham, 1979). The trade unionism in the industrial sector prompted the government employees to form their union, though the government service conduct rules prohibit the formation of unions. The government employees in the earlier times were not given adequate security benefits and even denied the basic rights such as right to organise, right to work, right to form unions and associations and right to collective bargaining. However, these rights were acquired by the employees as a result of many struggles.

Kerala Non-Gazetted Officers' (NGO) union is the oldest and the largest employees' union in Kerala. It is affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)). In the initial period of

its formation, the NGO Union was the only service organisation among the Non-Gazetted employees. But in the later stage, there emerged a lot of service organisations of the Non-Gazetted employees. At present, there are six important NGO organisations in Kerala. They are the NGO Union, the NGO Association, the Joint Council Of State Service Organisation, the NGO Sangh, the NGO Centre and the (Kerala Government Employees' Union (KGEU). At present, the gazetted officers also have their own associations working on party lines.

FORMATION OF NGO UNION:

Even before the formation of the state of Kerala, associations for the Non-Gazetted Officers were in existence in Travancore and in Malabar. Both the Travancore NGO Federation that came into existence in 1938-39 and the Madras NGO association that operated in 1920 were the two sources of inspirations for the formation of public service organisations in Travancore and in Malabar. The Madras NGO association extended its activities in Malabar area because Malabar was a part of the Madras Presidency till the formation of Kerala in 1956. K.N.G. Panicker points out that the Madras NGO Association was recognised by the provincial government in 1924. The membership of the Madras NGO. Association was open to all NGOs. Instead of passing a full resolution, the association submitted its demands to the government (Panicker, 1989). However, the Travancore State Congress helped to the formation of public service union in Travancore area. The Travancore NGO Federation which came into existence in 1939 extended its activities to the Kochin area during 1940s and came to be known as Travancore-Cochin NGO Federation. At the same time, the Cochin NGO Association which came into force in 1939 acted as independent organisation in Cochin area.

The joint action of the central government employees led to the revision of pay and dearness allowances (DA) to the central government employees in 1946. This created a wide gap in the pay of the provincial employees, which provoked the Madras NGO Association leaders to call for a strike demanding an immediate pay revision. This strike of the employees in Malabar province prompted the government employees in Travancore to organise effectively to acquire their benefits. On August 10, 1947, a meeting held at Chenkal Choola, Thiruvananthapuram, resulted in the formation of the Travancore NGO Association (TNGOA). The association grew all over Travancore and there were 42 local committees and 2600 members. During this time, the government issued certain orders restricting the formation of the unions and associations by the government employees. The relevant portion of the said order is as follows. "Any government servant who is or becomes a member of an association of government servants which is not recognised by the government shall be liable to be suspended or removed from the government service. The membership of the Association shall be confined to a distinctive class of government servants" (Sukumaran Nair, 1982). The government also instructed to dissolve the existing unions which were not complying with the above said order .

After the formation of Kerala, the activities of the North Kerala NGO Association spread all over the State. In 1956, a movement was started under the auspices of the North Kerala NGO association to remove the ratio for promotion existing between graduates and non-graduates in State service. In the same year, the Travancore-Cochin NGO Federation became the Kerala NGO Federation. The union demanded the integration of service and equation of position with that of former Madras State and to prepare a common seniority list of employees working in these two States. A committee was formed under the State Re-Organisation Act (Art 150) to examine the demands of the Union, and the demands were accepted later (Jos Prakash, 2008). The first

communist ministry of 1957 appointed a pay revision committee and it submitted its report in 1958. This has brought reforms in the pay and benefits of NGOs in Kerala. In 1958, the North Kerala NGO Association launched a movement to form a single organisation for the whole NGOs in Kerala. A resolution to this effect was passed and a sub-committee was formed to examine the feasibility of this proposal. An adhoc committee was constituted for this purpose, and the committee prepared a Bye-Law for the new organisation. In 1958, the new organisation called as "The Federation Of Kerala Services Association" (FKSA) was formed with K. Chellappan Pillai as the President and E.J. Francis as the General Secretary. In the mean time, the Kerala NGO Federation, the Ministerial Staff Union and the Central Kerala NGO Association merged with this organisation and acted as a part of this. As a result of the dismissal of the communist government in Kerala by the central government in 1959, the union leaders began to think of forming a strong organisation for NGO's, and for this purpose, a convention was held at Thrissur in 1962. It was in this convention that the Kerala NGO Union was formed.

The NGO Union covered the all of the NGOs in Kerala including the category associations up to the end of 1960s. In the initial period of its formation, the NGO Union leaders argued that, only one organization was required for all the NGOs. During 1950s and the 60s, it stood for the integration of various service associations which had existed in the former Travancore - Cochin State and Malabar. E.J. Francis, E. Padmanabhan, N.K.M. Chettiyar and T.V. Appunni Nair, were considered as the strong and committed leaders behind the formation of this organisation. Since these leaders were left-minded people, the leftist ideologies influenced the NGO Union. But the situation changed in the mid 1960s when the political intensification got dominance over the affairs of the NGO Union. There were differences among the leaders of the NGO Union with regard to the implementation of the second pay revision commission report and this led individual conflicts between E.J. Francis and E. Padmanabhan in 1967.

FORMATION OF JOINT COUNCIL OF STATE SERVICE ORGANISATION:

The Joint Council of State Service Organisations was formed by a group of employees who had defected from the NGO Union in 1969. This was because of the fact that the NGO Union leaders could not take a unanimous stand on the rectification of the anomalies in the implementation of the Second Pay Commission Report. Moreover, the Departmental/Category Associations were very active among the NGOs in Kerala. The category association leaders argued that one organisation of the NGOs could not handle the issues of the different categories of NGOs efficiently and effectively. Some category associations like Kerala Land Revenue Officers' Associations, Kerala Civil Supplies Staff Associations and the Ministerial Staff Associations in the Education Department were very strong during that time. These category associations alleged that the NGO Union was fostering the big brother attitude by imposing the Marxist ideology against the interests of the whole NGOs in Kerala. Thus, the NGO Union was clearly divided on the ground of political affiliations. In 1969, some of the leaders of the NGO Union and the former Kerala NGO Federation met at Thiruvananthapuram and formed an adhoc committee to form the Joint Council Of the State Employees' Organisations(Nampoothiri, 981). The committee stood for all the category associations of the state-level employees with equal representation for all the member associations. The aims of the joint forum were to deal with issues having common nature and to settle disputes between category associations. The committee also submitted a memorandum to the government of Kerala for rectifying the anomalies in the pay revision of the government employees. In short, the political differences among the leaders of the NGO Union were considered as the major reason behind the formation of the Joint Council.

The new organisation known as the “Joint Council of State Service Organisations” came into existence in May 1969. E.J. Francis, former President of the NGO Union, was elected as the President of the Council (Jos Prakash, 2008). This union got all support from the CPI.

BIRTH OF NGO ASSOCIATION AND OTHERS:

After the strike of 1973, the Joint Council split into two categories. One faction of the leaders of the Joint Council moved out from the parent organisation and formed the Kerala NGO Association under the leadership of K. Karunakaran Pillai in 1974. The new organisation was a pro-Congress organisation. When the Congress Party split into Congress (A) and (I) led by A.K. Antony and K. Karunakaran respectively, the NGO Association also split on the same line. In 1979, the NGO Association was divided due to the factionalism of the Congress Party and when the two factions of the party (Congress I) and (Congress A) were united, the two factions of the NGO Association also got united. In 1976, the Kerala Congress, the splinter group of the INC, formed the Kerala NGO Front and when the Kerala Congress split into several factions led by K.M. Mani, P.J. Joseph, T.M. Jacob and P.C. Thomas, their employees organisation also split as Kerala NGO Front (M), and the Kerala NGO Front (J). The Janata Party unit in Kerala took initiative to form, the Kerala NGO Centre in 1977. Prior to this, S. Viswambharan Nair of the Lottery Department took initiative in forming the National Government Employees Forum and this gave rise to the formation of NGO Janata Centre. One group of the Janata Party unit formed the Kerala NGO Sangh in 1980 and now it is supported by the Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP) (Abubakker, 1990). Another wing of the employees who supported the Janata Party formed the KGEU in 1991.

By the end of 2000, the NGO Association again split into two factions, one led by Kampara Narayanan and other led by Mankad Rajendran. The split occurred when Kampara Narayanan, the then President of the NGO Association, refused to resign from the Association when he was promoted to the Gazetted post. But he relinquished the promotion and continued as an NGO in order to get the status and position in the association. As per the NGO Association Bye-Law, when an employee is promoted from the Non-Gazetted rank to the Gazetted rank, he should relieve himself from all the official work of the association. But, Kampara Narayanan did not resign and had not discussed it in the State Committee and because of that, the faction which supported Mankad Rajendran moved away from the NGO Association and formed a separate one called “NGO Association (I)”.

Apart from these, many categorical/departamental associations of government employees are functioning in the State of Kerala. The gazetted officers in Kerala have two employees organisations, namely the Gazetted Officers’ Association and the Gazetted Officers’ Union. These gazetted service organisations are acting as allied organisations under the banner of the Federation of State Employees organisation (FESTO) and the State Employees Organisation (SETO). Kerala Gazetted Officers’ Association which was founded in 1966 is a left-oriented employees organisation and it actively participates in the organisational activities in the State. The Kerala Gazetted Officers’ Union is a right-oriented employees organisation which support the pro-right policies of the government. But a notable point is that the gazetted officers’ organisations are affiliated to the general union. But majority of them are independent and they have their own Bye - Laws and norms.

ROLE OF STRIKES IN THE GROWTH OF SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN KERALA:

The government employees in Kerala have conducted several strikes in order to get the attractive pay and service benefits. The strikes of service organisations in 1967, 1973, 1983, 1993 and 2002 were either to increase the salary and service conditions of government employees or to prevent the government's move to cut the service benefits of employees. The NGO union gave notice to the strike of January 1967 demanding accession of central pay parity, scraping of the confidential system from State service and revision of Kerala service rules. After the strike, the confidential system was limited to certain categories and the second pay commission was appointed. The government also agreed to provide DA to the State government employees on central basis.

During 1970s, the government employees and teachers conducted several strikes to get interim relief and for pay reform. The strikes of 1971 and the strike of 1973 prompted the government employees to make unified and vast association to raise their common demands. This action gave rise to the setting up of different sister organisations such as FESTO, SETO and the FETO. Further, the strike of 1973 enabled the employees to make pressure on government to accept the principle of 'five year pay reform' in Kerala. During 1980s, several strikes were organised by the allied employees forum and it led to the growth of new employees unions in Kerala. The strikes conducted by the college teachers to get pay on UGC scale, the teachers' strike against setting up of Predegree Board and the government employees' strike for leave surrender allowances etc., are not worthy of it. The DA strike, the pay equalisation strike and the strike for timebound grade promotion system have resulted to the growth of government employees' forum in Kerala. Now a days, no government employees' association can raise demands in an isolated way. This is because of the fact that every employees' organisation have common demands to a larger extent. Therefore, both gazetted and non-gazetted service organisations on political lines join together and put pressure strategies to fulfill the common demands and aspirations. Until recently, the part time employees were not given equal pay and service benefits and they were not given an equal status in the State service. The NGO Union took initiatives to organise the part time employees and conducted a strike in 1993 demanding honorable remuneration to the part time workers. As a result of this, the Part Time Contingent employees' organisations existed and later this organisation merged with the NGO Union.

The introduction of globalisation and liberalisation policies have resulted many discontents among government employees. The scraping of the service benefits and abolition of posts have impeded the employees' union to organise demonstrations against the pitfalls of privatisation. Thus in 1990s, it is observed that the strikes of employees got new face unlike 70s and 80s. In the year 2002, all government employees in Kerala, irrespective of their political affiliation, launched a general strike against the move of the UDF government to cut the salary and service benefits of government employees. This strike became a remarkable event in the history of the trade Union movement in Kerala for two reasons: (i) The unity and strong determination of the government employees forced the government to revoke the punitive steps it had taken against the employees. (ii) This strike reminded the government that it should take its employees into confidence before any action is contemplated against them (NGO Union, 2003).

SUMMING UP:

This article examined the historical background and political prospects of the service organisations in Kerala. The employees' organisations in Kerala grew up as a movement among NGOs and later it spread in the field of other employees. The NGO Union was formed in 1962 and its leaders visualised a strong organisation among the NGOs in Kerala. But after a period of ten years, the NGO Union was divided on political grounds. During the 1970s and the 1980s, a large number of service organisations emerged in Kerala on ideological basis. The demands of service organisations in Kerala are connected with the implementation of pay reform, promotion, enhancing DA, and other service benefits. For that purpose, the service organisations in Kerala conducted many strikes on several occasions. The strikes have undoubtedly proved that the government employees' organisations in Kerala are acting as pressure groups and every political party or government cannot close its eyes towards the demands of the employees. Sukumol Sen, the former General Secretary, AISGEF observes, "The strikes are the political weapons to acquire the demands and aspirations of any group or individual, but the white collar employees due to the reputation and the fear of disciplinary actions may be reluctant in organising and participating in the strike. But, for obtaining democratic and trade union rights, the strikes are necessary and promptive".

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