

Need, Scope and Evolution of Labour Welfare – A Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract – The constitution of India guarantees complete freedom and protection to every individual for the fullest realization of his individual personality. In the present age of technical development the problems of labourers are becoming more and more complex. In the light of this thinking a study of welfare programmes for labourers assumes great significance. The objective of the present study is to spell out the need, objective, evolution and to find out the measures for the effective implementation of various labour welfare schemes.

Key words: Labour Welfare, Constitution

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of Indian Constitution is to set-up a welfare state. The distinguishing characteristics of the welfare state is the assumption by the community, acting through the state, of the responsibility for providing the means where by all its members can reach certain minimum standards of health, economic security and civilized living and can share according to their capacity in the social and cultural heritage.

The constitution of India guarantees complete freedom and protection to every individual for the fullest realization of his individual personality. According to Directive Principles of State Policy as stipulated in the Indian constitution: -

The citizen, men and women, equally have the right to an adequate mean of livelihood:

The ownership and control of the material resources of the community are distributed so as best to sub serve the common good.

The operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to common detriment;

There is equal pay for men and women;

The health and strength of workers, men, women and children of tender age, are not abused and citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter into avocations avocation unsuited to their age or strength; and Child hood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

In the present age of technical development the problems of labourers are becoming more and more complex. In the light of this thinking a study of welfare programmes for labourers assumes great significance. The objective of the present study is to spell out the need, objective, evolution and to find out the measures for the effective implementation of various labour welfare schemes. As a matter of fact, it is being increasingly realized the world over and in India, that with the advancement of technology and its advent in agricultural, Industrial and related spheres, the problems of working population are becoming increasingly complex. All this has major economic and equally, if not more, importantly, social and political implications.

The present study has been divided into two sections. Section - I deals with the need, objectives and scope of labour welfare, whereas section - II has been devotes to a critical analysis of the Labour welfare schemes.

SECTION- I

1.1 The Need of Labour Welfare

In this part of the study, we begin by discussing the thinking on the need for the labour welfare at the global level, moving to the Asian and National levels. Some of the broad steps taken in this direction at these levels are outlined.

Though only a small part of total population in India are employed in the organised sector, industrial workers today constitute functionally a very significant and vulnerable element, they also constitute a substantially to the nation's economy. But if we make on over-all survey of the living and working conditions of

workers, the need for labour welfare in India would immediately become apparent. These welfare services have become necessary to counteract the handicaps to which workers are exposed, both in their work- life and social life and to provide opportunities and facilities for the harmonious development of the workers' personalities.

In their work life, workers have many a time to work for long hours in unhealthy surroundings. Those who have migrated from rural areas, find themselves engulfed by and lost in an uncongenial and strange environment. As a result, they fall prey to alcoholism, gambling and other vices, which demoralize and, sometimes, completely dehumanize them.

The higher rate of labour absenteeism in India industries is indicative of the lack of commitment on the part of workers, for they want to escape, whenever possible, from the environment of the work site. This absenteeism can be reduced by the provision of good housing, of health and family care, of canteens where healthy, balanced diet is made available in congenial surroundings.

Good educational and training facilities for workers are also very necessary in Indian industries because of the high rate of illiteracy among them. These facilities would also help in decreasing the number of industrial accidents, in increasing workers efficiency and then sense of commitment. Other recreational facilities help workers to improve their health and develop their personality and make them feel that the state and employers are interested in their welfare. These also help in reducing the druggery of their work.

Family welfare, child welfare and maternity care facilities help workers in a variety of ways. They reduce infant mortality, improve the health of the spouse and keep the family size at the desirable minimum. They also tend to reduce these workers anxiety and absenteeism in so far as these were due to sickness in the family.

The provision of suitable facilities designed to meet the need of migrant workers can help them settle down more easily in their new working and living conditions. A proper organization and administration of welfare facilities can play a vital role in promoting better working conditions and living standards for industrial workers and also increase their productivity, especially in developing countries. It is obvious, however, that the scope of labour welfare depend on the kind of problems in existence and on the types of welfare which are needed in different situations.

Labour is an indispensable factor of production. Healthy and congenial Labour- management relations are the pre-requisite for efficient production. Labour welfare measures both on and off the job, are very crucial, since they are bearing on the workers willingness to work and their productive capacity. In a very significant sense, it is the workers who really deliver the goods.

Just as machine should be kept in good conditions for smooth operation, the operator too should be maintained in satisfactory physical, emotional mental and moral conditions for unbroken and increasing production. If workers are fed properly clothed adequately and treated kindly, and if the conditions of work are congenial, they will work efficiently. Welfare programmes are the means of securing, preserving and increasing the efficiency of Labourers.

The need and importance of Labour welfare has for long been appreciated throughout the civilized world. It is being increasingly felt in the developing countries, like ours. The concept of welfare, however, varies from country to country depending upon social customs, degree of industrialization and educational development of workers. The international Labour Organistaion, in one of its publications, has defined the term Labour welfare as services, facilities and amenities as may be established in, or vicinity of, undertakings with a view to enabling persons employed therein to perform their work in healthy and congenial surroundings. The term welfare includes:

- i) Feeding facilities;
- ii) Rest and recreation facilities and work;
- iii) Transportation to and from the work place where ordinary public transport is inadequate and Impracticable.

The National Commission of Labour appointed by the govt. of India in 1966, also observed that the concept of labour welfare is comprehensive and embraces a multiplicity of activities, such as working conditions, educational and recreational facilities, sanitation and health, housing etc. which help in increasing productive capacity of the workers.

The social concept of labour welfare implies the welfare of a man, his family and his country. There are interconnections among these three aspects, in the sense that all three work together as a three dimensional conglomerate, each serving the other two as an end and as means.

Welfare refers to, or signifies, a positive concept in as much as it stipulates the provision of certain minimum necessary and acceptable conditions of existence, biologically and socially. These conditions pertain to the provision and availability of certain minimum quanta of health, food, clothing, housing, medical assistance, insurance, education, recreation, job security, and so on. However, Labour welfare has a negative side too. While on the positive side, it signifies the provision of opportunities which enable the workers and his family to lead a better life socially and personally as well as help him in adjusting to the transition in work life, family life and social life, on the negative side, labour welfare functions with a view to neutralizing the effects large scale industrialization and provides a counter- balance to the undesirable

social consequences and the labour problems which have evolved in the process of this transition.

The word 'labour' means any productive activity. Thus, in a broader sense, the phrase labour welfare means the adoption of measures to promote the physical, social, psychological and general well-being of working population. Labour welfare measures in any industry aim or should aim, at improving the working and living conditions of workers and their families.

The concept of labour welfare is, however, flexible and differs from time to time, region to region and country to country, depending upon the value system, level of education, social customs and degree of industrialization and the general standards of socio-economic development of the people.

Further it depends upon the kind of problems with which the society is confronted as well as the structure of the industry. It is moulded to age group, sex, socio-cultural background, marital status, economic status and educational level of employees in the various industries.

Broadly speaking, measures and activities taken by the state, employers and association of workers for the improvement of workers, standards of living for the promotion of their social and economic well-being are labeled as welfare work. On this account, welfare work may be defined as, "work for improving the health, safety, general well-being and industrial efficiency of workers beyond the minimum standards laid down by the Factories Act and other labour legislations",¹ According to H.S. Kirkaldy, the whole field of welfare is on in which much can be done to combat the sense of frustration of industrial workers, to relieve them of personal and family worries to improve their health, to afford them a means of self-expression, to offer them some share in which they can excel all others, to help them to widen their conception of life".²

According to Royal Commission on Labour in India, "It is a term which must necessarily be elastic', bearing a somewhat different interpretation in one country from another, according to different social customs, the degree of industrialization and educational development of the workers."³

According to the Encyclopedia of social sciences," the term is used to describe the voluntary efforts of an employer to establish within the existing industrial system, working and, sometimes, living and cultural conditions of his employees beyond what is required by

law and customs of industry and the conditions of the market."⁴

1.2 Objectives of Labour Welfare

Initially, humanitarianism and social awareness motivated labour welfare activities. More generally, however, it is the desire to get greater efficiency and output from workers, and a motive to attract better workers, that make the employers offer extra-incentives in the form of labour welfare schemes. Such schemes also make it possible for employers to persuade workers to accept mechanisation. Sometimes, labour welfare is used by employers to combat the influence of outside agencies of their employees. Labour welfare measures are often undertaken with a view to avoiding payment of tax on surplus and simultaneously building up better relations with employees. The desire to show off and advertise their concern labour are also factors which play their part in persuading employers to go in for labour welfare schemes. The bigger the organization the greater the expenditure incurred on such advertisement. Thus the motives that lie behind Labour welfare schemes are often complex, for human nature varies from person to person, certain characteristics, however, dominate in each successive period of the development of labour welfare movement and this is clearly seen in the broad historical perspective of industrial welfare. It often happens that if an organization adopts! introduces certain measures for the purpose, other organisations in the same industrial are may follow suit and thus in spreading of labour welfare movement in and around that particular industrial area.

1.3 The Scope of Labour Welfare

The concept of labour welfare, by its nature "must necessarily be elastic, bearing a somewhat different interpretation in one country from another, according to different social customs degree of industrialization, educational development of workers." The scope of Labour welfare has to be elastic and flexible enough to suit the existing conditions of workers, and to include all the essential pre-requisites of life, and minimum basic amenities, our constitution, in its Directive Principles of State policy, refers generally to "the promotion of the people." In its specific applications to the working class, the necessity of, "securing just and human conditions of work" for them has been highlighted; but what these conditions actually imply cannot be specified in rigid terms for all times.

According to labour Investigation Committee, welfare work may be considered to include anything done for intellectual, physical and moral betterment of workers whether by employers, by government or by other agencies, over and above what is laid down by the

¹ Industry and Society – A sociological appraisal of Modern Industrialism, pp – 250-251.

² Kirkaldy, H.S. The spirit of industrial Relations, pp. 77-78.

³ Report of the Royal commission on Labour in India, p. 281.

⁴ Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. XV, 1935, p. 315

law and what is normally expected as a part of contractual benefits for which the workers may have bargained. Thus, under this definition, we may include housing, medical and educational facilities, nutrition including provision of canteens, facilities for rest and recreation, co-operative societies, day nurseries and reaches provision of sanitary accommodation, holiday with pay, social insurance measures undertaken voluntarily by employees alone or jointly with workers including sickness and maternity benefits schemes, provident funds, gratuities and pensions, etc. The term welfare is thus very flexible as well as comprehensive.

The scope of labour welfare is fairly wide and is not specific to anyone country, one region, or one occupation or one industry.

The scope of labour welfare has been described by different authors differently. The line of demarcation cannot be very precise, but we can say that in the final analysis, labour welfare services should:

“enable the workers to live a richer and more satisfactory life, contribute to the productivity of labour and efficiency of enterprises;

Raise the standards of living of workers by indirectly reducing the burden on their purse;

Be in tune and harmony with similar services obtaining in a neighboring community where an enterprise is situated;

Be based on intelligent prediction of future needs in industrial work, and be so designed as to offer a cushion to absorb the shock of industrialization on workers; and

Be administratively viable and essentially developmental in out-look.”⁵

The scope of labour welfare cannot be limited, however, the facilities with in or near the undertakings. Nor can it be so comprehensive as to, “embrace the whole range of social welfare activities or social services. It follows, therefore, that all extra- mutual and inter-mutual activities as well as statutory and non-statutory welfare measures undertaken by employees, government, trade unions or voluntary organizations fall within the scope of labour welfare. Thus it encompasses activities and amenities related to canteens, rest and recreation facilities, medical assistance, travel to and from work place, education, housing facilities and so on. It can also include social security measures which contribute to workers welfare such as industrial health, insurance, provident fund, gratuity, maternity benefits, compensation, pension, retirement benefits; etc which are the species of the larger family encompassed by the term “Labour welfare”.

SECTION – II

EVOLUTION OF LABOUR WELFARE

Worker's welfare as a movement begins in early years in the western countries. Considerable impetus was given to movement by the two world wars, as part of industry's effort to maximize production. Thus modern welfare may be said to have been the outcome of the movement for better and more efficient management in industries including the human angle. The all round acceptance of the concept of labour welfare was mainly due to:⁶

The need to provide a better life for the workers was dictated by the necessity to maintain the goodwill of the large and rather freshly requested war time labour force and to gear them to increase production:

The industrial expansion in the advanced countries of the world and the concomitant process of mass production and mass selling led to the emergence of the working classes as source of power. Steps to promote labour welfare were a direct recognition of the new situation.

There was also influence of the researches into scientific management and industrial psychology, which presented abundant evidence on importance of worker as human being and a total personality.

It has been a matter of public and government concern, especially in economically less developed countries for the amelioration of working living conditions of industrial workers and measures in this regard were being taken in many countries as an aspect of national policy.

In the conclusion we can say that the concept and percent of labour welfare as there are prevalent and accepted in present time have been proceeded by the gradual evolution in different directions in different countries.

2.1 Report of the Survey Team on Labour Welfare

A survey team was appointed in December, 1859 at the instance of Labour minister with the purpose of recommending labour welfare schemes for the third five years plan, It was composed of the senior officers of the Labour ministry.

The committee's observations were only based on the material already available with the office of the government. The committee sought to divide the Labour welfare facilities into two categories as follows:-

⁵ Labour investigation Committee, Main Report, 1946, p. 345

⁶ I.L.O. Recent Developments in certain Aspects of Indian Economy Vol. Iv, 1959, p.86.

Those that may be provided with in an undertaking and those to be provided outside the undertakings.

Such facilities be provide either by the government, the employers, the workers' organisation or welfare agencies such as welfare fund etc. Facilities inside the undertaking according to the committee were:-

Working conditions;

Health and sanitary arrangements;

Permeation of fatigue;

Washing facilities;

Canteens;

Creches;

Transport to and from the place of work;

Fair price shops, postal facilities and savings.

The committee recommended the followings-

Strict enforcement of the factories Act,. Mining and plantation

Labour Act;

Training course in first aid;

Supply of cheap nutrition's food packets;

Improvement in the standards of crèches in factories;

Expansion of fair price shops;

Setting up a labour welfare found by the state government at

Bombay;

A system of in- plant training;

Health homes;

Travel concessions etc.

The committee did not think it possible to extend the benefits of social security to all the workers, but felt that the provident fund could be amalgamated into a pension scheme in due course of time.

2.2 Labour Welfare Work in India

The need of labour welfare, as stated earlier, is important because it creates a healthy atmosphere in the work place keeps the labour force stable and contented, helps in maintaining industrial peace,

thereby improving production efficiency of workers. It is in recognition of this need that the successive five year plans in India have envisaged additional welfare measures both at the centre and the state levels, for all the workers engaged in the various sectors of the economy.

In India, schemes of Labour welfare were introduced for the first time during the second world war in ordinance, ammunition and other factories engaged in war production, mainly to keep up the morale of workers and to increase productivity with the achievement of independence and emergence of the country as a republic wedded to the ideal of welfare state and socialistic pattern of society, efforts in this direction were intensified.

A discernible feature of government policy in this regard has been to bring matters connected with workers' welfare more and more within the preview of legislation setting appropriate standards. The Factories Act, 1948, the plantation labour Act, 1951 and The Mines Act, 1952, are basic enactments which contain elaborate precisions for sage- guarding the health and safety of workers inside the working place and for eventuating their welfare. All those acts lay down the minimum standards for ensuring health and welfare of workers.' The Employers are free to improve these minimum standards. Panel provision in these acts can't be taken recourse to by the competent authorities in the event of contravention or lapses on the part of the employers. Besides these statutory provisions, the central government has constituted labour welfare funds for operation in certain mining activities like coal, mica, iron ore and lime stone and mines, these funds regulate welfare of workers employed in different mines. Separate welfare funds have also been formed for specified services - post & telegraph, parts, dockyards, railways etc. Some of the states also have enacted their own welfare legislation, e.g.; The Asian Tea Plantation employees welfare Funds, 1959; The Bombay Labour welfare Fund, 1953, etc.

The provision of social security measures in the form of Provident fund, gratuity and pension under the various laws, and the industrial housing schemes undertaken by the central government are meant to, and they do, promote welfare of the working class.

2.3 Welfare Work by Employers

Many of the welfare facilities like canteens, pithead baths in mines have now been made statutory obligations. With the introduction of Employees State Insurance Schemes, medical aid is no more the responsibility of employers, their associations provide facilities for welfare of labour.

In the kolar gold mines, one main hospital with 240 beds, a dispensary, well equipped maternity clinic continued to function for the benefit of workers and

their families. Under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, the managements are provide certain welfare amenities like drinking water, conservancy, medical aid, housing, education and recreation facilities, etc. to plantation workers,. The Railways have a huge welfare organizations with a very wide range of activities.

2.4 Welfare Work by Workers Org Nisations

A few workers' organizations are also engaged in welfare work for industrial employees. The most important among them is the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad, The Association spends a large' portion of its income on the social and educational upliftment of workers. The Association maintains a number of social and cultural centers for promotion of activities like literacy, group talks, adult education, seminars on important topics, imparting training to women in handicrafts like sewing, embroidery etc. A few nursery schools were maintained by the Association.

These were a large number of consumers cooperative stores, co- operative credit societies and housing societies for the working class. The Association maintained a workers co- operative Bank from where workers could get loans repayable in easy installments.

In this study, we have attempted to spell out in some details the various meaning and interrelations that have been put on the concept of Labour welfare , We have also tried to show how the concept evolved over time in different countries, regions and industries. The most noticeable features have been the flexibility and comprehensiveness of the idea and scope of labour welfare. It has been modified and moulded to suit the various time - specific and place- specific conditions. However, the core, the primary focus, has all the time and everywhere been the amelioration of the working and living conditions of the workers. Labour welfare has always and everywhere signified the ensuring of satisfactory and healthy working millieu for the workers, The actual context of the policy, the legislations, the measures implemented for the purpose has of necessity, varied from time to time and from region to region, to cope with, what we have termed above, the time- specific and place- specific constraints.

In final conclusion, we can sum up by saying while the government means well, but mere good intentions are not enough. It must also effectively implement the various programmes of Labour welfare already in existence and must make quantities and qualitative improvements and additions, A gramme measures is better- than a tonne of unimplemented proposals, however, well- meaning the letter might be. This is as true of the policy and performance in the context of labour welfare as in most others.

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