



**TRADE UNION  
MOVEMENT IN INDIA**

# TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

## FIRST PHASE (1850 - 1903)

- Foundation of modern industries in India was laid between 1850 and 1870.
  - ❑ **First Cotton Mill** in 1853 in Bombay.
  - ❑ **First Jute Mill** in 1855 in Calcutta.
- **Lord Dalhousie's Railway Minute of 1853**
  - ❑ Envisaged a network of railways connecting main places with the ports and providing for strategic needs as well as commercial development.
- **Sasipad Banerjee:**
  - ❑ A Brahma Samajist.
  - ❑ Founded "**Working Men's Club**" in 1870.
  - ❑ Started a monthly '**Bharat Shramjeebi**' to educate workers.
- **Sorabjee Shapoorji Bengalee in 1875** started agitation to draw attention of the Government towards deplorable conditions of women and children in Indian industries.
- **Narayan Meghji Lokhande:**
  - ❑ An associate of **Jyotiba Phule**.
  - ❑ Started a weekly '**Deenbandhu**' from Bombay in 1880.
  - ❑ Founded **Bombay Millhands Association** 1890; was a labour union not a trade union, only gave free advice to millhands.
- **First Factory Commission in 1875.**
  - ❑ To enquire into the working conditions of the factories.
- **First Factory Act 1881:**
  - ❑ Applicable to factories using mechanical powers and with employees of not less than 100 persons.
  - ❑ Prohibited employment of children below 7.
  - ❑ Limited number of working hours (9 hrs) for children between 7-12.
  - ❑ Dangerous machine to be fenced.
  - ❑ 4 holidays per month.
  - ❑ Opposed by **Ranade's 'Quarterly Journal'** and **Tilak's Mahratta**, as Nationalist opinion generally refused to concern itself with labour conditions in Indian-owned enterprises.
- **Second Factory Commission 1884.**
- **Second Factory Act 1891:**
  - ❑ Applied to all factories employing not less than 50 persons.
  - ❑ Limited working hours for women to 11 hrs with an interval of one and half hrs.
  - ❑ Increased minimum age of children from 7 to 9 and upper age from 12 to 14.
  - ❑ One day rest a week for all workers.

## SECOND PHASE (1903-18)

- **Labour Unrest in Bengal.**
  - Strikes in white controlled enterprises. Reasons: rising prices and racial insults.
  - **Pioneer labour leaders:**
    - ◆ **Aswini Kumar Banerjee**
    - ◆ **Prabhat Kusum Roychoudhari**
    - ◆ **'Athanasius' Apurba Kr, Ghosh**
    - ◆ **Prematosh Bose**
  - In September 1905: walkout of 247 clerks of **Burn Company in Howrah** in protest against a new work-regulation.
  - **Tram strike in Calcutta in October 1905:** settled through the efforts of Banerjee and Ghosh.
  - Strikes in Jute mills and railway workshops.
  - **First Real Labour Union: Printers Union**, set up on October 21, 1905.
  - **Railway Men's Union in July 1906:**
    - ◆ Set up by clerks.
    - ◆ To draw in the coolies.
    - ◆ Meetings at Asansol, Jamalpur and Raniganj.
  - Jute strikes frequent between 1905 and 1908 – affecting at various times 18 out of 37 mills.
  - **Indian Millhands Union** at Budge-budge in Aug 1906 by A.K. Banerjee.
  - **Inspirer Journals**
    - ◆ **Pioneer:** Anglo Indian journal
    - ◆ **Nabasakti:** Extremist journal
  - Tilak's arrest in 1908:
    - ◆ No real political or workers' strikes in Bengal, unlike Bombay.

□ **Plantation and mine labour unaffected.**

□ Nationalist interest in labour slumped totally after 1908 and would not be renewed before 1919-1921.

- **Subramanian Shiva**

□ A plebian agitator from Madura.

□ With **Chidambaram Pillai** preached message of **swaraj** and **boycott**.

□ Shiva caused workers strike at foreign owned **Coral Cotton Mills** Result: 50% rise in wages.

- Factory Acts of 1909 and 1911: concerned with Jute industry.

- Other Most Notable Organisations:

□ Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India (1897).

□ Postal Union in Bombay(1907).

□ Kamgar Hitvardhak Sabha (1909).

□ Social Service League (1911).

- **Features of labour movement during pre-1918 phase:**

□ Movement led mostly by social reformers and philanthropists, not by workers.

□ Leaders belonged to moderate school of politics.

□ There were sporadic organizations.

□ No trade union in true sense existed.

## THIRD STAGE (1918- 26)

- After 1<sup>st</sup> World War, trade union movement got intensified.

- **First Trade Union in India:** Madras Labour Union in 1918.

□ Founders: G. Ramanajula Naidu and G. Chelvapati Chetti ( both associated with Annie Besant's New India.

□ President: B.P. Wadia.