

Industrial Relations in the Glass Industry of U.P. (with special reference to Glass Bangle Factories of Firozabad)

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Abstract

The glass industry of Uttar Pradesh, particularly the glass bangle factories of Firozabad, occupies a significant position in India's industrial landscape. Known as the "City of Glass," Firozabad is the country's largest center for glass bangle production, employing thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers. This research paper examines the nature of industrial relations in the glass industry of Uttar Pradesh, with special reference to Firozabad's glass bangle sector.

The study explores the relationship between employers, employees, and trade unions, focusing on issues such as wages, working conditions, labor welfare, and collective bargaining. It also analyzes the challenges faced by workers, including low pay, job insecurity, occupational hazards, and lack of social protection. The paper highlights the efforts of government bodies and labor organizations in improving industrial harmony, promoting fair labor practices, and ensuring sustainable development in the region.

The findings reveal that while industrial relations in Firozabad's glass industry have gradually improved due to modernization and policy interventions, deep-rooted problems such as informal employment and poor labor standards persist. Strengthening social dialogue, enforcing labor laws, and improving workplace safety are essential to fostering stable and equitable industrial relations in the glass bangle industry of Firozabad.

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Introduction

Harmonious relations in every sphere of human activity are an essential condition of social, economic, and political progress. But the increasing complexity of the modern industrial system has tended constantly to widen the gap between those who own and manage industry and those who work in it.

Industrial peace is a boon not only to labour but also to the employer and indeed, to the nation as a whole. A contented labour force is a guarantee of optimum efficiency and productivity. The problem of industrial peace therefore, is not merely a welfare problem but a production problem also. The success of planned economic progress is vitally linked with rapid improvement in productivity and thus with industrial peace.

The modern industrial system is full of complexities. A gap between the employers and the employees is widening day by day giving rise to industrial conflicts, resulting in low production and creating hardships to the society at large. As a result of the industrial unrest, the national income is also reduced and maladjustments appear in the national economy. Thus, the importance of harmonious industrial relations for the success of modern industries and also for the welfare of the society as a whole cannot be overemphasized as observed by Dr. V.L. Srivastava that industrial relation is 'a part and parcel of the human relationship at large and not as something extraneous to it One of the main social and political thoughts in a modern community is the establishment and maintenance of harmonious relations in industry.1

Importance of Industrial Relations:

The importance of industrial relations has greatly increased in recent years with the changes in the concepts of 'industry', 'labour' and 'industrial relations. Industry is, now, neither a venture of the employers alone nor is profit its sole objective. It is a cooperative venture and service to the society is its ultimate motive. Each agent of production capital, management, or labour, contributes in its own way towards its success. 'Capital and management without labour would be sterile and labour without capital and management would be disorganized, ill-equipped and ineffective.

Glass Industry of Uttar Pradesh:

The inception of the glass industry in India and the state dates back to the 16th century but during those days the production was carried on mostly by hand and the quality of glass so produced, was rough. A particular community known as 'Shishgar' residing at Firozabad, a township of Uttar Pradesh was perhaps the inventor of glass not only in Uttar Pradesh but in India. The establishment of modern factory industry dates back to 1908 when the first factory of glass factory in Uttar Pradesh was established at Firozabad. Since then, it has been growing at a rapid rate.

The industry is highly concentrated in Firozabad township. Nearly 88.5% of the total glass factories of the State in the year 2020 (i.e. 217 out of 245) employing about 80.0% of the labour of the total labour employed in the glass factories are located at Firozabad 2 and in its vicinity within a radius of 25 km. including the townships of Etmadpur, Tundla, Hirangau, Makkhanpur and Sheikhabad.

The industry may broadly be classified into two broad categories viz.,

1. Factories producing glass and glass bangles.
2. Factories producing glassware and other articles of glass other than bangles.

The glass bangle section of the industry requires a number of processes to be completed before its final finish.

The glassware industry on the other hand is comparatively organized and mechanized. It does not require so many processes for its final finish as are required by glass bangle units.

The glass industry on the whole, is a peculiar type of industry. It cannot afford to permit workers to go on strike since it takes several days to bring a glass furnace to the requisite temperature. But after the desired temperature is reached, the furnace must be utilized around the clock for several weeks. A strike would cause heavy financial losses to the employers in the form of unproductive consumption of coal and breakage in the furnace.

Really it is very difficult to satisfy all the workers, all the time. All the more, it is very strange that the different categories of workers employed in different processes choose different timings for putting their demands by way of organizing strikes before the employers.

Industrial Relations in the Glass Industry of Uttar Pradesh:

Most of the glass factories of the State are small and medium-sized, employing a sufficient labour force as the industry is mainly based on manual labour. Therefore, it is very necessary that the labour of the industry should be properly handled. On the contrary, it is found that the strikes and lock-outs, especially in its bangle manufacturing section, are quite common.

Many studies in industrial relations have been undertaken and most of them have been on the initiative of the Planning Commission and the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment. The studies conducted in the field, like "Industrial Relations in India", by Charles A. Myers, and the case studies in the "Tata Iron and Steel Company" and the "Indian Aluminium Company" have been some of the pioneer studies.

Hypothesis:

- The study of industrial Relations in the Glass Industry raises many issues

- The industrial relations in the glass industry of the state have not developed on effective lines and so unhappy industrial relations are generally being reflected in high rates of absenteeism and labour turnover and a larger number of grievances, complaints, strikes and lock-outs.

Research Methodology:

The methods adopted in the present study have been those that could provide an intimate knowledge not only of each selected unit but also of the position of the industrial relations in the glass industry of the State as a whole. It has always been the effort of the investigator to collect as much information as possible from various sources employing various tools and techniques of research. These include sampling, schedules, interviews, observations, analysis and consultation of the records of the sampled factories; the State Government, trade unions and the employers' organizations.

The industrial relations in the glass industry of the State have not developed on sound lines and unhappy industrial relations are generally reflected in high rates of absenteeism and labour turnover, and a larger number of grievances, complaints, strikes and lock-outs.

The factors responsible for the present State of Industrial relations in the glass industry of the State are many, they are not only economic and political but also social and psychological. The employers of the industry want maximum profits and employees desire to get maximum wages. The low wages and earnings have undoubtedly been found to be an important aspect of increasing labour unrest among the workers of the industry.

Since the glass factories of the State are small and medium-sized, the traditional patterns of organizational structures and management that are found in big concerns are not found in the glass factories. A strict hold is kept by the employer and the whole of the staff of the factory works under his direct control. The manager is directly responsible to him and works as a mouthpiece of the employer. The position of supervisor or foreman is important as he is a link between the employer and the working force.

No bangle unit appoints a labour welfare officer as the units are too small to be covered under the statutory obligations of appointing the labour welfare officers in the factories.

It has been observed that the glassware factories are better organized and managed than the glass bangle factories and this is the reason that the glassware factories have better industrial relations than the glass bangle factories which are ill-managed and comparatively less organized than the glassware factories.

The workers of the glass factories have also organized themselves in trade unions. The first trade union of the Glass Industry of U.P. is the Mazdoor Sabha,

Firozabad, which was registered on 7th of August 1938. In 1954 the number of registered trade unions in the industry rose to 6 and in 1960 to 15. At present there are 32 trade unions with 9712 workers as members. The reason for the increase in the number of trade unions is attributed to the pressure of leaders and workers 'willingness owing to the deteriorating conditions of the labor class in the industry.

The study of trade union leadership in the industry reveals that the trade unions of the industry are surrounded by the outsider leaders. Out of 50 office bearers under study belonging to 10 trade unions 38 have been found to be outsiders and only 12 belong to the workers' group. All the Presidents, treasurers and about 80.0% of secretaries and vice-presidents have been found among outsiders.

Most of the trade union leaders of the Industry have joined trade unions for their personal benefits. Their activities are limited.

The trade union leaders have no work during peacetime and thus they always try to create an atmosphere of industrial unrest by raising different types of demands and thereby get money from the employers for calling off their threat of action.

The attitude of employers towards trade unions is one of apathy and active resistance. The employers also adopt the tactics of victimization. Most of the employers have called trade unions as undesirable organizations and do not want to negotiate with them.

The multiplicity of trade unions has led to the formation of small trade unions that compete rival to one another. Many good causes have been lost on account of the differences among different trade unions.

The industry also provides employment to women and child labour also. Their respective percentages in the industry are 3.5 and 6.6 of the total labour force of the industry. But it is important to note that no child or woman worker has been found permanent.

The working conditions in glass factories of the State are highly deplorable. Sitting accommodation has been found to be very limited and there is overcrowding in the factories. The roofs are old and leak during the rainy season. The temperature under which the workers have to work remains very high inside the factory building. The factories are also full of dust, flames and vapours.

Thus the general working conditions in the Industry are far from satisfactory. These are far less than what has been prescribed by legislative provisions. The tiresome and unattractive working conditions contribute to workers' dissatisfaction which embitters labour management relations and gives rise to industrial strife and discontentment.

Besides this, the wages and earnings of the workers are very low and it has been found to be one of the main causes of industrial disputes in the Industry. The

wage system in the Firozabad centre has been found peculiar as most of the workers are daily rated and their daily wages are subject to great fluctuations. The worker is discharged as soon as another

A worker who is willing to accept a lower wage is found.

The problem of labor over is also severe in glass factories. When a factory is closed for 'Bhatti' repairs, all the workers are discharged and they have no guarantee of employment at the restart of work. Thus they keep on moving from one factory to another.

The welfare activities are provided both under statutory provisions and on a voluntary basis. The present study reveals that nothing concrete has been done in this direction by the employers, trade unions and any social service agency etc.

Suggestions:

The conventional and common methods of recruitment through the favour of owners need a complete change and the workers should be recruited through the employment exchanges and labour officers.

Most of the disturbances in the industry are caused by low wages. There always remains a tug of war between the employers and the employees on the question of wages. To avoid this unhappy situation the formation of a wage board is urgently needed.

The acts should be strictly complied with and strict vigilance should be kept by the inspecting staff. The present survey reveals that the workers of the industry live in the private rented kotharies which lack proper sanitation and hygienic conditions. It is, therefore, suggested that a large number of houses should be built at the important centres of the Industry by the employers and the Government.

Personal contacts between the management and workers be encouraged and the psychology of the workers and the employers be changed.

The employers should be compelled to provide the worker, atleast with the minimum welfare facilities prescribed under the law and those who do not provide these facilities should strictly be dealt with.

For the healthy industrial relations in the industry it is advisable that the right to strike and lock-out should be curtailed or voluntarily forfeited by mutual agreements between the workers and managements.

It is, therefore, suggested that institutional facilities for technical training should also be made available at least at Firozabad where about 80.0% of the glass factories are located.

In the end it may be stated that only humanitarian outlook on the party of the employers, Government officers and the workers can remove tension in the industry. Humanitarian out-look cannot be cultivated without higher education.

Therefore, stress must be laid on educational facilities. Nodoubt wages offer a powerful incentive to workers to work but these fail to change their out-look. In fact they desire much more than wages. In order to secure the whole hearted co-operation of workers, the dignity of labour has to be recognised and the needs of the workers be properly and adequately served. Such an approach to labour and its needs would create its stake in the factories motivating the labour to work most economically and efficiently. The workers should devote themselves to industrial pursuits heart and soul. Their ultimate objective should not be the monetary reward but service to the community for which the industry, in fact, strives. The trade unions should act as responsible agencies in society. The Government officers should do justice and should have a broad outlook. These conditions will certainly improve industrial relations in the glass industry of the State.

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