

International Multidisciplinary
Research Journal

Golden Research
Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

Golden Research Thoughts Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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LABOUR WELFARE LEGISLATIONS IN MADRAS STATE, 1948-1960



S. Kowsalya

Introduction :

Exploitation of labour was a routine work of the employers in olden days. It was at the dawn of Twentieth Century, many leaders and economists rose to the situation and realized the exploitation of labour. They demanded to stop exploitation and vowed to rescue the labourers. Even though there were several enactments in Madras State regarding labour welfare, nothing was accomplished on the right path. Majority of the Acts and Laws were in favour of the employers, and they utilized it for their benefit. Similarly, the labour welfare laws were not properly implemented in the Madras State. Hence the unquestionable exploitation continued for a long time. After independence, Government of India amended several existing laws and also enacted much new legislations. The Factories Act of 1948 occupies a prime place in industrial reforms and labour welfare¹.

Abstract :

Labour welfare means "Anything done for the intellectual, physical, moral and economic betterment of workers, whether by the employers, by the government or by other agencies over and above what is laid down by law or what is normally expected on the part of the contractual benefits for which worker may have bargained." Labour welfare is a flexible and elastic concept. Its meaning and implications differ widely with times, regions, industries, countries, social values and customs, general economic development of the people and political ideologies prevailing at particular moments. As such, a precise definition is rather difficult. The paper is an attempt to highlight the welfare measures in the form of legislations initiated for the cause of the labourers in the Madras State by the Madras Government

Key words : Labour, Welfare, Act, Factory, Employee, Insurance, Industry, Madras State.

Short Profile

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The Factories Act, 1948

The Factories Act of 1948 was a comprehensive measure and to a great extent, it is to improve the working conditions of the labourers inside the factories². Even though the Act was enacted in 1948, it was not implemented properly for a long time. After the introduction of Five Year Plans only, the state governments implemented the Act as per the guidance of central government. It abolished the distinction between the seasonal and non seasonal factories and provided for the licensing of factories and

approval of the layout and plans of the factories at the blue print stage itself by the chief inspector of factories by analyzing all safety measures for the labourers³. The Government of Madras State raised the standard in regard to measures of health, safety and welfare, and it increased the minimum age of employment

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from 12 to 14 for children and upper age limit for adolescent from 17 to 18, so that exploitation could be controlled to certain extent⁴. Regarding labour welfare measure, the striking feature of the Factories Act is that it prohibited the overlapping shifts and ordered the factory managements to place a welfare officer in factories employing 500 or more workers. It also reduced accidents in factories and talks were given on safety and on prevention of accidents to supervisory personals and workers⁵. The Madras Government provided 'Safety Awards with Rolling Shields' to the companies which showed the largest percentage of reduction in rate of accidents.

[Madras Factories Rules, 1950](#)

Following the implementation of Factories Act, the Madras Factories Rules was enacted in the year 1950. It aimed on various labour welfare regulations in Madras State and several subsequent changes were brought under the Act. On 29th June 1952, a resolution was passed in the meeting conducted by 'Posta Sharamik Sangh', Calcutta regarding the weight of bags carried by the labourers⁶. The resolution clearly stated that one labourer can hardly carry a bag weighing 2 ½ maunds or 3 maunds. If the workers are supposed to carry bags weighing more than the specified weight, it will cause accident and also injurious for health of the worker. So, after analyzing the necessity of the regularization of the weight of the bags of the commodities, the Commissioner of Labour of Madras State recommended to the government to regularize the weight of the bags to be carried by the labourers in the factories. By accepting the recommendation of the Commissioner of Labour and under the direction of Government of India, the Madras State Government fixed the weight of the bags carried by the workers in factories as 2 maunds, under the Madras Factories Rules, 1950⁷.

[Plantation Labour Act, 1951](#)

Another important aspect in labour welfare in Madras State was the enactment of Plantation Labour Act in 1951. In order to improve the conditions of the labourers working in plantations, a Plantation Labour Advisory Committee was formed. The committee studied various aspects of regulation and recommended for various regulations. It emphasized on the workers who continuously worked on day preceding 12 months in the farms of area measuring 25 acres and more and 30 or more workers in number. It fixed the working hours for the adults as 54 hrs per week with a condition that the work hour should not exceed 12 hrs per day. The working hour for adolescent and children are fixed as 40 hrs per week. Compulsory weekly leave with salary was allotted to the employees through this Act. In addition, the Act stressed to provide special treatment, educational and recreational facilities to the workers and till 1960, the government approved 19 medical schemes for the betterment of the employees⁸.

[Employee's State Insurance Act, 1948](#)

The most important welfare measure carried out by the government was the introduction of Employee's State Insurance Scheme. The foundation for labour welfare was laid before independence through the Workmen's Compensation Act and Maternity Benefit Act. Under the Workmen's Compensation Act 1923, the benefits payable to disabled workmen and to the dependents of the deceased workmen were in the form of lump sum amount. But it was not satisfactory because the amount will be frittered away and did not prevent the workmen from falling in want again. Hence the Government of India enacted the Act with a broader sense of providing free medical aid of higher standard irrespective of the employee's financial status and to avail cash benefits in order to sustain during sickness or injury occurred during employment⁹. The Act

was placed on the statute book in April 1948. But it was implemented on 27th January 1952 only. The Act applies to all factories, using power, employing 20 or more persons and engaged in manufacturing process, 'seasonal', factories as defined in Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 and the Mines, subject to Indian Mines Act and Railway Running Sheds are excluded from the scope of the Act. Persons in armed forces are also exempted from the scope of the Act¹⁰. As far as Madras State is concerned, the Act was first implemented in Coimbatore on 21st January 1955 by covering 40000 employees including 8000 women workers employed in 100 factories¹¹. Initially, the government established five Insurance Dispensaries with full time paid staffs in and around Coimbatore city. In addition, 45 doctors were appointed to provide treatment for the employees insured under the scheme. A mobile van was allotted to provide medical facilities to the employees of villages and out – lying areas of Coimbatore.

Subsequently the scheme was extended to Madras City and its suburbs on November 1956¹². In Madras City, it covered 52000 employees working in 250 factories and it was proposed to establish a ESI hospital with 100 beds. The important striking feature of the Act was that the insured person can select the dispensary based on the distance and convenience for availing treatment from his / her residence or factory. Similarly maternity benefit is also available for the women employees who are insured under the scheme. In due course of time, the state government extended the scheme to the whole state, and in 1960, an ESI hospital was established in Madras with 175 beds (150 - General and 25 – TB), 84 bedded hospital in Coimbatore and 12 bedded hospital in Sivakasi. With a view to help the insured person suffering from protracted diseases, the government extended cash benefit payable for a period of 309 days from 126 days, in addition to the ordinary 56 days sickness benefit from 15th August 1960.

Employee Provident Fund Act, 1952

To improve the economic security of a worker, the Employee Provident Fund Act was enacted and it was brought to force in the year 1952. It was made compulsory to all employees in the factories so as to get the benefits after retirement or to his dependents in case of his early death. Initially, it was implemented in textile, cement and certain other industries only and by the year 1960, it was extended to other industries like mica factories and mines,, plywood industries, automobile servicing and repairing industry, rice milling, flour milling, dhal milling, Cane farms owned by sugar industries. By 1961, 41 industries were covered under this scheme in Madras State. Similarly, by the amendment of the Act in 1960, the minimum strength was brought down to 20 from 50. The contribution of an employee was fixed as 6 ¼ % of the basic wage and dearness allowances with an alternate option to invest more by the employee, if he/she was interested. The striking feature of the Act was that no institution or company can claim any amount from the outstanding of the employee's provident fund in respect with the recovery of any loss committed to the company by the employee under any decree or act.

Miscellaneous Labour Acts

Besides those regulations, several other enactments were also laid down by the Madras State Government for the betterment of the employees in Madras State. The Working Journalists (Conditions of Service and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1955 provided various amenities to the employees working in newspaper industry. It categorized the news paper establishments as A, B and C and provided the allowances as per the provisions of the Act. By 1965, there were 292 establishments with 3599 employees in the state¹³. Similarly, The Madras Beedi Industrial Premises (Regulation of Conditions of Work) Act, 1958, The Madras Industrial Establishments (National and Festival Holidays) Act, 1958, The Madras

Weights and Measures (Enforcement) Act, 1958 and The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders of Madras Amendment) Act, 1960, occupies a prime place in maintaining the Labour Welfare in Madras State. In addition, the education imparted to the workers brought a drastic change in the labour welfare measures of Madras State.



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END NOTES

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