ANALYSING THE ROLE OF UNION INSTRUMENTALITY IN WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNIONS: A STUDY OF INDIAN MANUFACTURING SECTOR

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ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to study the factors influencing participation of women workers in trade unions in India. Its theme is based on the assumption (Klandermans, 1984) that the willingness to participate in an activity is the weighted sum of goal motives, social motives and reward motives. Goal and reward motives of participating in union may be related to union instrumentalities, whereas social motives may be linked to approval for union participation from family, colleagues and employer. Convenience in participating in union-related activities is another factor determining women’s participation in unions. We propose that union instrumentality moderates the relationship of women’s participation in trade unions with approval and convenience as constructs. Data from a sample of 214 women workers of 8 manufacturing units across 5 public sector organizations was subject to hierarchical regression analysis. Findings lend support to the moderating effect of union instrumentality.

JEL Classification: J51

Keywords: Union Instrumentality, Women Workers, Trade Unions, Union Participation, Approval, Moderator

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INTRODUCTION

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.” Jawahar Lal Nehru

Education and social awareness have both changed the face of India as regards employment of women. As on 31st March, 2010, around 58.59 lakh women workers were employed in the organized sector of the Indian economy including both public and private organizations, constituting 20.4 per cent of total employment in this sector (Annual Report 2012-13, Ministry of Labour & Employment). The percentage remained almost the same at 20.5 per cent as on 31st March, 2011. According to Employment Review, 2011 (Directorate General of Employment and Training, Ministry of Labour & Employment), employment of women in the organized sector has gone up steadily over the last eleven years. Not only are women entering sectors like banking, insurance and electricity, but they are also actively starting ventures of their own as entrepreneurs. In fact, among the three categories of employment, i.e., self-employed, casual workers and regular/salaried workers identified by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, the highest proportion of female workforce in the past few years has always been found in the self-employed group.

In spite of this increasing trend, a lot is yet to be done for women in both organized and unorganized sectors in India. Though women’s labour participation has been increasing over the years, their number in formal employment is still significantly lower than that of men. The Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) was estimated at 23.6 per cent at all-India level under the Usual Principal Status (UPS), as against Male WPR of 75.1 per cent (Annual Employment & Unemployment Survey, 2011-12, Ministry of Labour & Employment). Total female employment had declined by nearly 1 million in urban areas and by about 19 million in rural areas in the period from 2004-2005 to 2009-2010 (NSSO, 2006, 2011). Female unemployment rate at all-India level stood at 6.9 per cent in 2011 under the UPS approach as compared to 2.9 percent for males (Annual Employment & Unemployment Survey, 2011-12, Ministry of Labour & Employment).

Women’s tendencies to opt out of and re-enter the labour market and lack of required education are some of the reasons why unemployment is higher for women than men (ILO, 2012). As pointed out by Hensman (1988), it is more expensive to hire women in the formal sector, due to the legislation that grants generous benefits specific to women, namely maternity leaves, child care and exemption from working in night shifts. In Indian context, banning women from working in night shifts and in underground mines have further reduced the scope of employment for women (Ratnam and Jain, 2002).

A large proportion of women workers is usually found in the unorganized sector, which is beyond the purview of trade unions. It is thus the organized sector whose causes have been espoused by unions and this has over time assumed a male bias; moreover mainstream unions have been historically found to be lacking in addressing the needs of working women sufficiently (Mitter, 1994). Few women join trade unions in India and even the few who those join do not participate actively in trade union matters (Ratnam and Jain, 2002).
The various reasons cited in previous studies behind low participation of women in unions range from professional to personal. Professional reasons include organizational rules that hamper women’s advancement (Ledwith et al., 1990) and concentration of women in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, which limits their leadership prospects as leaders are often chosen from higher level job categories (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983). Ratnam and Jain (2002) point out that in Indian context even now women’s jobs and career are largely a function of male preferences and family circumstances. Personal reasons are in the form of family responsibilities and women’s lack of confidence in their own abilities (Chaison and Andiappan, 1989).

Given the instrumental role played by unions in improving the quality of life of workers (Ghosh and Geetika, 2007), it is considered worthwhile to study the factors influencing participation of women workers in unions in India. The theme of this paper is based on the assumption by Klandermans (1984) that the willingness to participate in an activity/action of social movement is a function of the perceived costs and benefits of participation in that activity/action. This can be classified under three heads: goal motives (motives related to the achievement of the goal of action); social motives (motives related with the expected reactions of significant others); and reward motives (motives concerned with anticipated rewards and punishments for participation). Willingness to participate is the weighted sum of these motives, and this implies that they can compensate each other.

We have applied this classification in analysing the factors responsible for women’s participation in unions. Following Klandermans (1984), the goal motives and reward motives of participating in union may be related to union instrumentality. On the other hand, social motives may be linked to approval for union participation from agents like family, colleagues and employer. However, there may be a host of other factors that may be considered from the perspective of convenience (or inconvenience) of women workers in participating in union-related activities. We hence project that women’s participation in unions depends on the approval they get and the element of convenience, albeit the union-environment is male-dominated. More specifically, in this paper we propose that union instrumentality moderates the relationship of women’s participation in union with approval and convenience as constructs.

The paper is structured as follows: we have highlighted the significance of feminization of unions in the next section, followed by a review of extant literature covering approval from different agents for participation in union and factors that can be ascribed to convenience to women member-workers in union participation. The section that follows discusses union instrumentality as an influencer in participating in unions, especially in context of women. We then elaborate on the research plan, followed by analysis of the major findings and implications thereof. The paper concludes with limitations of the research, followed by scope of further research.

**FEMINIZATION OF TRADE UNIONS: A NEW UNION STRATEGY**

Trade unionism is a direct product of industrialization. With a history close to a century in India, trade unions have been subject to a sea of changes in terms of functioning, objectives and mode of operation. Traditional functions of unions like safeguarding the interest of the working class have been expanded to modern functions like imparting training to workers and providing financial and legal assistance to the member-workers (Ghosh, Nandan and Gupta, 2009). Many researchers (e.g., Conley, 2000; Simms et al., 2000) argue that if trade unions are to halt membership decline, they need to successfully recruit and retain ‘non-standard’ workers including women. Cunnison and Stageman (1993, p. 220) posit that women and men share common interests that stem from common needs for money, employment security and work conditions; however, women have certain distinctive needs and priorities. Feminizing the trade union agenda would imply extending it to include such needs and priorities. It has been argued by researchers (e.g., Heery and Kelly, 1988; Cockburn, 1991) that for a union to project a ‘woman-friendly’ image, women must be fully represented in decision-making structures and among unions’ officials. Briskin and McDermott (1993, p. 5) observe that the “definition of legitimate trade union issues has been expanded as a result of feminist pressure to include issues like sexual harassment, child care, maternity leave, affirmative action, and pay equality”.

Female activists in UK are considered particularly pivotal to improve unions’ ability to recruit and retain women members, as it is thought that they assist in the creation of a ‘woman-friendly’ image and an environment which reflects women’s values, concerns and needs (Cockburn, 1991). In similar lines, Greene and Kirton (2002) observe that improvement in the level of membership and the number of women activists has been a central feature of overall ‘renewal’ strategies of many British trade unions. Ratnam and Jain (2002) observe that in India initially women workers were slow to unionize. Until the beginning of 2001, only twice and in only one national level union, namely the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), which is not affiliated to any political party, was led by women. However, with fast moving times and growing rate of employment, women are found to participate actively in the trade union movement; central level trade unions in India have pioneered by conducting of a number of programmes to educate women on their rights and encouraging them to participate in union-related activities. In fact, as pointed out by Ratnam and Jain (2002), some national-level unions in India...
have announced that if their affiliates do not include at least one woman member in a panel for nominations in various decision-making posts in the union hierarchy, the panel as a whole shall be rejected.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Hindrances to women’s participation in unions**

The issue of barriers to women’s participation in trade union activities is well-researched internationally. Review of extant literature prompts us to club the reasons behind low participation of women in union activities under two categories: ‘approval’ and ‘convenience’.

**Approval**

Literature support for social approval to participate in trade union activities is available in several theories. For example, the sociological approach predicts that the major influence on union membership can be found in an individual’s social context both inside and outside the workplace (Guest and Dewe, 1988). Klandermans (1984) explains three categories of people who are significant to union action: members of one’s family, colleagues and direct superiors. Spinrad (1960) groups the correlates of union participation into three categories: objective features (the job itself, pay, etc.); personal associations (membership in other organizations, family and friends); and personal orientations (job satisfaction, aspirations and non-work interests). Decisions of workers regarding union membership do not occur in social vacuum, but have been found to be influenced by the decisions and pressures of agents like family, co-workers, managers, employers, governments and union organizers (Snow et al., 1980; Klandermans, 1986; De Witte 1988; Hartley 1992, cited by Visser, 2002).

In the context of women workers, Josephs et al. (1988) found more women to report positive opinions of their union among family and friends; however women would find it more difficult than men to defend the union to family and friends in the event of a strike. Sharpe (1984) and Ledwith et al. (1990) have found women’s role at home and family support to be important in determining their participation in unions.

Summing up all aspects of approval of family, peers and employers, we have taken approval as an antecedent variable to women’s participation in union and hypothesize that: 

**H1**: Women’s participation in union is dependent on approval.

**Convenience**

The ‘crowding-out theory’ finds application in explaining union participation, as it predicts that the time available for participation in trade union activities will depend upon the time left after time has been allocated for work, household duties and leisure activities. Following this theory, less participation would be expected from women their male counterparts, given that women are usually assumed to be more involved than men with household duties (Harrison, 2001). Ratnam and Jain (2002) point out that a woman who is active in her trade union has to manage triple responsibilities of family, work and union. Gordon et al. (1980) assume that low involvement in trade unionism exhibited by women is a result of their family commitments. Wertheimer and Nelson (1975) have studied women’s participation in several New York City local unions and concluded that home demands, lack of education and consequent doubts of self-confidence inhibited participation in union affairs by women members.

Various aspects of union meetings often pose as barriers to women’s participation. Greene and Kirton (2003) opine that the traditional conceptions of activism, participation and democracy within trade unions require physical presence in union meetings at times and in places that may restrict the participation of women and other ‘atypical’ members. Kirton and Healy (1999) summarize pertinent difficulties for women in the context of union meetings (e.g., Beale, 1982; Cockburn, 1991; Cunnison and Stageman, 1995; Rees, 1992) as: inconvenient timing and location, usage of sexist language and behaviour, unfamiliar trade union jargon and procedures, and a male defined bargaining agenda. Lack of support for child care may impose additional cost on the already low earnings of women, which ultimately puts a price on attending union meetings (Treblilcock, 1991). Beale (1982) points out that “male culture” of unions keeps women away from union activities. Ratnam and Jain (2002, p. 286) neatly summarize aspects of union meetings that hinder women members’ participation in India as: tendency to have meetings at night, union jargon and sexist language and informal male structure (the “old-boys” network). Other inconveniences faced by women union members especially in Indian context include the notion that working in trade union is a 24-hour-a-day-job, lack of physical infrastructure for meeting the basic needs like childcare and toilet facilities, and safe, convenient and affordable transportation facilities at union offices (Ratnam and Jain, 2002, p. 286).

Overall we have included such hindrances by taking convenience as an antecedent variable to women’s participation in union activities and hypothesize that:
H2: Women’s participation in union is dependent on convenience.

**Union Instrumentality**

Instrumentality is a cognitively-based construct that is usually linked to a simple utility-maximizing model of behaviour (Barling, Kellowey and Brenerman, 1991; Newton and Shore, 1992, cited by Griffin and Svensson, 1996). The psychological approach explains union instrumentality with the help of the rational choice theory to propose that individuals are more likely to join trade unions when they perceive that the benefits of so doing outweigh the costs. Thus workers would be attracted to join a union to the extent that they perceive the union as a legitimate means for achieving salient goals (Brett, 1980). Union instrumentality is referred to as the degree to which a trade union is perceived to be effective in improving the lot of its members. Several studies (e.g., Griffins and Svensson (1996), Glick, Mirvis and Harder, 1977; Fiorito, Gallagher and Fukami, 1988; Kuruvilla, Gallagher and Wetzel, 1993) have established union instrumentality to be a factor influencing level of union satisfaction. Specifically Griffin and Svensson (1996) have used it as an attitudinal construct related to satisfaction with their union, as expressed by members of large Australian unions.

Bolton et al. (2007) have comprehensively explained the concept of trade union participation as the collective involvement of members in union-related activities, which are closely related to the effective functioning of a union. Participation and involvement in unions have been found to bear a direct relationship with instrumentality, expressed as “pay off” (Strauss, 1977; Anderson, 1978) from unions. This implies that members would support their unions if the latter were able to achieve the objectives and needs of the members (Strauss, 1977). Thus it is predicted that member participation in union activities is positively related to members’ perceptions of the union’s priorities and performance in obtaining intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, to responding to its membership, and to satisfaction of members with the union (Strauss, 1977). Chacko (1985) posits that member involvement and participation in union activities are more likely to be affected by their attitude and feelings towards the concerned union in terms of its goals or priorities and performance, consistent with the “bread and butter” approach of unions in USA. However, findings of the study by Chacko (1985) have revealed that perceptions of union power and service were not significantly related to member participation; rather they appeared to be relevant only for attending union meetings. Attitudes towards unionism and union power were important predictors of union activities (e.g., attendance, voting and seeking office) by Huszczko (1983).

Kolchin and Hyclak (1984) have suggested that workers who are dissatisfied at the workplace will turn to their local unions to fulfil their needs, especially intrinsic needs such as participating in and having control of their work. Lipset et al. (1956) argue that an individual union member enters membership with that union seeking to find an atmosphere compatible with his psychological needs (Perline and Lorenz, 1970). Such psychological needs may include a conscious desire to obtain personal power, recognition or financial gain (Seidman et al., 1950), and need for social interaction (Tannenbaum and Kahn, 1958). A union member identifies with the union only when it achieves what it promises, namely higher wages and better working conditions (Stein, 1963).

Bose and Mudgal (2012) have established that perceived union instrumentality is a significant factor determining trade union participation in the leather industry at Kolkata, India. Perceived benefits from the union, socialization factors related to trade unionism and gender have been found to affect commitment to the union (Gordon et al., 1980). Fullagar and Barling (1987) have found that perception of a worker of the instrumentality of his union in influencing conditions will moderate the impact of the influences upon and outcomes of his loyalty to the union. In context of women workers, if they perceive unions as ineffective in improving their working conditions, then their commitment to unions would be lower than that of men (Fiorito and Greer, 1986).

On the basis of above discussion we have considered union instrumentality as an important determinant for participation of women workers in trade union. Our proposed model is depicted in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: PROPOSED MODEL OF MODERATION OF UNION INSTRUMENTALITY**

Convenience

Approval

Union Instrumentality

Women’s Participation in Union
We accordingly hypothesize that:

H3: Union instrumentality moderates the relationship of approval and convenience with women’s participation in union.

MEASURES

Participation in trade union was measured with four indices of worker participation in union activities. Survey respondents were asked to indicate how often they had participated in each activity (1=never to 5=very often). The four-item scale includes three items: Vote in the union’s internal elections; Go to union’s meeting; File a grievance through your union’ from the scale originally used by Chacko (1985) and a self-developed item ‘Participate in union activities as a whole’ (α= 0.752).

Convenience was measured by a self-developed five-item scale. Participants responded using a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items included are: ‘Timing of union meetings is suitable to me’; ‘I have sufficient time to participate in union activities in spite of family responsibilities’; ‘It is convenient for me to travel between my home and union office’; ‘Trade union office has proper infrastructural facilities’; and ‘The cost of union membership is affordable to me’ (α=0.691).

Approval was measured by a four-item self-developed scale. Participants responded using a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items in the scale are ‘My family has supported me in my decision to join the union’; ‘I feel that female colleagues approve of women joining the union’; ‘I feel that male colleagues approve of women joining the union’; and ‘Employers react positively if women workers join the union’ (α= .695).

Union instrumentality was measured by using a seven-item scale concerning the possible benefits that unions could achieve for their members in the domains of unfair labour practices, job security, working conditions, wages, health and safety, supervision and overall benefits. Items for the scale were derived from previous union instrumentality questionnaires (e.g., Kochan, 1979; De Cotis and Le Louarn, 1981; Fullagar and Barling, 1989) (α=0.815). The five-point Likert-type scale had anchors 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

METHOD

The survey was conducted across 8 manufacturing units of 5 public sector organizations in India. The questionnaire was distributed to 287 non-managerial women workers of these units. It was appended with a cover letter mentioning the purpose of the study and the affiliation of the researchers. It also assured the participants of anonymity and confidentiality. The process of data collection took around a month, and the completed questionnaires were personally collected. However, 73 questionnaires had some missing data and hence could not be used further. The final number of usable questionnaires stood at 214, registering a response rate of 74.5 per cent.

Demographic data in Table 1 suggest that with respect to age, the highest representation is of the age group of below 30 years (46.3 per cent), and the lowest at 17.2 per cent of that of more than 45 years. The composition of respondents in terms of length of service with their respective organizations reflected that the shortest and longest tenures are of 14.1 per cent and 36.3 per cent respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 45 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Service with Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS
Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations among the variables. As can be seen from the values, participation in trade union is significantly related with convenience (0.270, p<0.01), approval (0.715, p<0.01) and union instrumentality (0.368, p<0.01).

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Convenience</th>
<th>Instrumentality</th>
<th>Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>3.7708</td>
<td>0.93698</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentality</td>
<td>2.8785</td>
<td>0.97827</td>
<td>0.244*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>3.3583</td>
<td>0.93760</td>
<td>0.245*</td>
<td>0.392**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Trade Union</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.284</td>
<td>0.270**</td>
<td>0.368**</td>
<td>0.715**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

West (1991), we have mean-centered all the model variables to reduce the risk of multicollinearity of the moderator terms. A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the moderating effect of union instrumentality. In tables 3 and 4, convenience and approval were regressed in Step 1 respectively on the outcome variable (i.e., participation in trade union). As predicted, we found that both independent models for convenience (Adjusted $R^2=0.327$) and approval (Adjusted $R^2=0.317$) are significant. Step 2 in tables 3 and 4 (i.e., Model 2) measures the effect of union instrumentality on participation in trade union. Union instrumentality is found to significantly impact participation in trade union in both regression models (Adjusted $R^2=0.388$ and 0.334). Finally, the interaction term was entered into the model to test the moderating effect. As indicated by the significant interaction term in Table 3 and Table 4 (i.e., Interaction Model), union instrumentality moderates the relationship between convenience and participation in trade union as well as the relationship between approval and participation in trade union. Significant change in $R^2$ between steps 2 and 3 shown in Table 3 ($ΔR^2=0.005$, p<0.01) and in Table 4 ($ΔR^2=0.033$, p<0.01) lend support to the assertion that the interaction of union instrumentality with convenience and approval will have a moderating effect on participation in trade union. Hence, on the basis of the results, both the hypotheses are accepted.

TABLE 3: REGRESSION RESULT OF HIERARCHICAL MODERATION ANALYSIS WITH UNION INSTRUMENTALITY AS A MODERATOR BETWEEN CONVENIENCE AND PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Instrumentality</td>
<td>.340</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in $R^2$</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in $F$</td>
<td>9.290</td>
<td>11.231</td>
<td>12.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. F Change</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 4: REGRESSION RESULT OF HIERARCHICAL MODERATION ANALYSIS WITH UNION INSTRUMENTALITY AS A MODERATOR BETWEEN APPROVAL AND PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Instrumentality</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>.375</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>.334</td>
<td>.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in $R^2$</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>.347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in $F$</td>
<td>8.290</td>
<td>10.231</td>
<td>11.540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Towards extending existing research to analyse the barriers to participation of women workers in trade union activities in the context of the Indian manufacturing sector, we have explored the process of moderation, linking the constructs convenience and approval to union instrumentality. We had initially proposed that union instrumentality moderates the relationship of convenience and approval of family, peers and employer with participation by women in trade unions. Data on women workers from the Indian public manufacturing sector support our model. The results have several theoretical and practical implications, which we would discuss here in turn.

First of all, this study sheds light on the nature of relationship of convenience of women workers and the approval of their family, peers and employer on participation in trade unions, and shows a positive relationship between these constructs. These findings add to the existing literature that examines the antecedents of workers’ participation in trade unions, especially in context of women. Moreover, our research has illustrated union instrumentality as a moderator in the relationship of convenience and approval with participation in trade union. We may hence deduce that women workers who have convenience as well as approval from their peers, employers and family members are more likely to participate positively in union-related activities. By introducing union instrumentality in the relationship of convenience and approval on participation in trade union we have extended previous research, which has individually focused only the antecedents of workers’ participation in trade unions. In this connection we argue that although union instrumentality as a construct has been conceptually and empirically established to be related in a positive way to participation in trade unions in previous studies, it may be better positioned to moderate the relationship of convenience and approval.

These findings illustrate that the relationship between antecedents (i.e., convenience and approval) of participation in trade union might not be related in a straightforward manner as is assumed in most research till date. The findings rather point towards the importance of contextual variables like union instrumentality which moderate this relationship. In other words, our results demonstrate that participation of women workers in union can be augmented if union instrumentality is in place. Women workers may demonstrate less participation in union, not because they may lack approval from their peers, employers and family members or may have inconvenience due to constraints like time or distance, but their low perception of union instrumentality may lead them to do so. And this has important implications for literature related to union participation as a whole. If women workers perceive union activities are instrumental in the accomplishment of benefits in job-related issues, their satisfaction with union activities may also improve and consequently they would be able to divert some of their time from family responsibilities and invest such time in union-related activities.

In practical terms, our results indicate that unions need to be aware that in addition to offering convenience to women workers in terms of infrastructural facilities at the union office, redesigning schedules and timings of union meetings, etc., to ensure their increased participation in union activities, union instrumentality is also critical to establish a positive relationship between convenience and participation in trade union. Overall the findings show that perception towards union instrumentality plays an important role in raising level of participation of women workers in union. However, the extent to which antecedent variables like convenience and approval would affect women’s participation in union would vary as a function of perceived union instrumentality. This means that unions need to first focus on increasing convenience and approval to increased participation of women workers in union, and then supplement this with positive union instrumentality, especially in context of women. Yates (2011) observes that unions have made significant changes to increase women’s participation, leadership and interest representation, with the twin goals of improving women’s equality at work and removing barriers to women’s labour force participation arising from their greater responsibilities. Considering the already high barriers Indian women face in joining and participating in unions, this would be a difficult, though not impossible task for trade unions in India.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with any research, this study has a number of limitations that must be clarified while interpreting its findings. First, the data was cross-sectional; future research can use longitudinal methodology to gauge whether the moderator role played by union instrumentality us actually able to enhance participation of women in unions. Second, the data for this study were obtained from women workers of 8 units of 5 public sector enterprises in the manufacturing sector of the Indian economy. Given the less participation of women workers in manufacturing, as a consequence, the extent to which the findings reported here are generalizable to all workers cannot be ascertained. The study can be extended to the service sector, which has comparatively greater participation of women, to obtain new insights. Third, the instrument used in the present study to measure union instrumentality was based on other measures of instrumentality in literature and assesses attitudes regarding a union’s ability to
achieve extrinsic goals. However, following Webster (1979), many women workers may consider union instrumentality in achieving more intrinsic outcomes. Future research should hence consider intrinsic and extrinsic instrumentality both individually and as moderators in affecting union participation.

The present findings have established union instrumentality as one of the features of trade unions that may be critical in influencing an individual’s decision to participate in union in a positive way. We therefore encourage future studies to incorporate union instrumentality at workplace as a moderating mechanism through which antecedent variables of workers’ (both genders) participation in trade unions may influence their decision to participate in union. Moreover, future research could further analyse how other variables like self-efficacy can enhance perceptions towards union participation. Taken together, the relationships established in this study, along with other antecedents, can be further studied to examine their effect on outcomes variables like satisfaction with union, for both men and women workers.

REFERENCES


