

LABOUR MOVEMENT OF MANBHUM IN INDIA: DURING THE TWO GREAT WORLD WARS (1918-1939)

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Abstract: Manbhum was a geographical part of Chotonagpur plate. Basically this region infested by various minerals. Small and heavy industry set up here for this cause. Labourers are worked in the mines areas and in the industry. This area also connected with the railways. A large number of labour worked in Railway. This region has a long history of labour and trade union movement. Tata, Adra, Bokaro, Dhanbad are the main place of trade union movement in the area. The labourers of the area demanded their rights in the colonial phase. Between the two great world wars the area cited a large number of labour movements.

Keywords: Manbhum, geographical part, various minerals, Small and heavy industry, labour movements.

1. INTRODUCTION

Manbhum district was one of the districts of the East India during the British rule in India. The district was created by Regulation 13 of 1833. The Jungle Mahal district was broken up and a new district called Manbhum was constituted with headquarter at Manbazar. The Manbhum district was a very large in size and included parts of Bankura and Bardhaman district of present West Bengal and Dhanbad, Dhalbhum and Saraikela-Kharswan district of present Jharkhand. The whole Manbhum district formed the eastern part of Chotonagpur division of Bengal province¹, is in fact, the first step in gradual descent from the elevated plateau of Chotonagpur proper to the plains of lower Bengal. The area of this district as surveyed in 1875 was 4914 square miles. According to first census report of 1872, the total inhabitants of the district was 9, 95,750. When the district of Manbhum was in Chotonagpur division it was bounded on the north by the district of Hazaribag, on the east by Burdwan and Bankura, on the south by Singhbhum and Midnapore, on the west by Ranchi and Hazaribag. A considerable portion of the northern and north-eastern boundary was marked by the Barakar and Damodar River, while west and south, the Subrnarekha River divided the district from Ranchi and Singhbhum². The district of Manbhum had all India significance because of its tropical location and its shape. Manbhum district was a gateway between the developed industrial belts of West Bengal and the less developed lands like Orissa, Jharkhand, and Bihar. Manbhum district has thick forest, with good minerals resources and has mixed different religious and social group. Agriculture was the chief source of livelihood in the district. The principal crops grown in the district of Manbhum were Rice, wheat, kalai, sugarcane, indigo, tobacco, tasar, silk etc. In her mineral resources, Manbhum was very rich. Of her wide range of minerals, the most important were china-clay, coal, copper, fluorite, road materials and quartz. Mineral resources were an important factor in Manbhum. It solved the problem of unemployment. Many colliery workers worked in the mines. Indian railways also been benefited by coal. Iron was used for making railway lines and engine. Copper, limestone were also important minerals resources which available here. It flourished the economy of Manbhum. It creates

a suitable atmosphere for industrialization. The relation between capital and labours appeared to be satisfactory³. In this situation working class people growing rapidly. The present paper belongs to labour movement of Manbhum between the two great world wars in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are to know the various perspectives and dimensions of labour politics in Manbhum.

2. METHODOLOGY

Various primary and secondary sources used to done the study. Historical and descriptive method used to done the study.

WHAT IS TRADE UNION AND LABOUR MOVEMENT?

Labour is the outcome of factory system and Trade union is the outcome of the emergence of labour. With the establishment of factory system labour grows as a class, and it happens in case of India too. Factory system had been installed in India only in the middle of 19th century. Trade union and Labour movement are used by anonymously. But that is not so as labour movement is conceived as “All of the organized activity of wage-earners to better their own condition either immediately or in the more or less distant future⁴”. According to Prof. Cole- “Labour movement implies in some degree, a community of outlook. It is organization or rather many forms of organization based upon the sense of a common status and a common need for mutual help⁵.” It emerges from common need to serve a common interest. It seeks to develop among workers a spirit of combination, class consciousness and solidarity of interest and arouses consciousness, for self respect, rights and duties. It creates organization for their self protection, betterment of their social and economic position and safeguarding of their common interest. A trade union is an essential basis of a labour movement become the Labour movement cannot exist without it and more over the trade unions are principal schools in which the workers learn the less of soliditary and self reliance.

CAUSES OF LABOUR MOVEMENT IN INDIA:

The growth and development of the labour movement and for that part of the Trade union in India were gradually progress. The development of Industries led to large scale production on the one hand and social evils like unemployment and exploitation of women and child labour and the deplorable working condition, the govt. attitude of complete indifference in respect of protection of labour from such evils, on the others⁶. Some of the worst features of industrialization marked the history of early factory system in India. In certain respect, condition of labour in Indian factories was worse than in the early factories in England. Unfortunately there was no effective public opinion which could represent the suffering of the working class. The workers who were for the most part villagers endeavoring to improve their position by a temporary alliance to industry were submissive and unorganized.

Though the history of modern industrialism in India began as early as 1850, the labour movement of India rather started very late. The labour movement till 1918 was strictly constitutional and relied mainly on moderate methods such as petitions, memorandum, committees, commissions, investigation and legal enactments.

The year 1918 was an important one for the Indian labour movement or Trade union movement. It marked the start of a new era of labour movement in India. The labour movement could take permanent roots in the Indian soil only after the close of first world war⁷. This situation was due to 1) the industrial unrest that grew up as a result of grave economic difficulties created by war. The rising cost of living prompted the workers to demand reasonable wages for which purpose they united to take resort to collective action. 2) The success of Russian Revolution of 1917 created a revolutionary wave of Ideas and a new self-respect and enlightens and added momentum to the feeling class-consciousness among labourers. 3) The establishment of the I.L.O in 1919 gave dignity to the working class and also an opportunity to send delegation to the annual conference of this body. It was from this body that labour movement in various countries derived their inspiration, help and guidance. 4) The non-cooperative movement of Gandhiji during 1920-21 and his support to the demand of industrial labour also greatly influenced the working class movement.

VARIOUS TRADE UNIONS IN INDIA:

At about this time many unions were formed, such as, Indian seamen’s union both at Calcutta and Bombay, The G.I.P, Railway workers union of Bombay, The Madras textile labour union, The Jamshedpur labour association , The Indian colliery employees, Association of Jharia, and unions of employees of various railway. The Madras textile union was the

first union in modern sense, which was formed in 1918 by B.P Wadia. In 1920 a spinner's unions as well as weaver's union were formed at Ahmedabad at initiative of Mahatma Gandhi. The textile labour association was formed in 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi. It adopted of truth and non-violence as its means to get demands fulfilled. In 1920, representative of 64 trade unions with a membership of 1, 40,854 met in Bombay and established the All India Trade Union Congress under the chairmanship of Lala Lajpat Roy. It had support of such national leaders like Motilal Neheru, J.L. Neheru, C.R.Das, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose and other from the Indian national congress. This loose, federal organization was brought into being chiefly to facilitate the selection of delegates to represent Indian labour at the I.L.O conference. But it also set before itself the task of coordinating the activities if several individual union existing in the country. Promoting the interests of Indian labour in economic, social, and political matter and mobilizing the labour force in the service of Swaraj movement⁸.

LABOUR MOVEMENTS OF MANBHUM:

In this time labour movement were spread in many provinces in India by local political leaders. Beside that many nationalist movements occurred influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhian movements in Manbhum district, the people of Manbhum felt the pulse of the movements of the Railways and colliery workers, which kept Manbhum in constant agitation. Under the leadership of Swami Biswananda these movement of the workers took place at Adra, Jharia, Dhanbad, and Bhojudi and some other places. This labour movement started in Manbhum in 1919 and reached its highest watermark in 1925. The oppression of the labour leader could not put an end to this agitation, who demands equal pay for work with their European counter part. It surcharged the political atmosphere of Manbhum which created the ground for communism in near future.

In 1925, the movement so long remained in the hands of middle class intellectuals took the form mass movement in the district. Many leaders of Manbhum like Atul Chandra Ghosh, Bibhutibhusan Dasgupta, Jimutbahan Sen, Bholanath Mukherjee joined this movements. In that year Mahatma Gandhi visited purulia accompanied by Rajendraprasad and Mazharul Haq which inspired people. In that year press established at Purulia. 'Mukti' a weekly news paper was published by Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta from Purulia. Manbhum district congress committee was also formed in 1925. Agricultural farmers and peasants also began to join these movements.

At that time congress leaders are run the movements by the demands of labours and farmers. In 1927, 40,000 railway workers called all India strike for their demands. Their demands are hike of salary, bonus, daily 8 hours duty, against demotion policy etc. Manbhum zilla congress committee supported the strike and they appreciated the demands of the railway workers. At Adra railway station the strike got a vast character by the leadership of V.V.Giri, chairman of Indian labour sangha. The labours of Adra railway took part in the strike independently. Police took action on V.V.Giri⁹. In 25 february, 1927 a mass movement organized at Chakbazar of Purulia against the police atrocity on V.V. Giri. From the various part of district, people took part in the meeting. The leaders of Manbhum Congress committee invited Adra railway workers to retain their strike. Congress committee of Manbhum helps the strikers by giving money and they formed a committee. At last the railway authority appreciated the workers demand. The railways authority, the leaders and congress workers of district, a tripartite meeting held on the matter and railways authority fulfilled the demands of the workers¹⁰.

Dhanbad was an important place of Manbhum. Dhanbad region was famous for the main center of labour agitation of Manbhum. It is a coal mine area. In between 1937-38 there was 11 strikes occurred in Dhanbad region. Prabir Kumar Mallick formed Dhanbad communist party. Sushil Dasgupta helps Prabir Kumar Mallick. They formed an activist group at Purulia. Dhanbad and Jharia was became a center point of student activism during this time¹¹.

Jamshedpur was a notable place of Manbhum district. Tata Iron and Steel Company were established in 1907 by Jamshedji Tata there. Tata workers union is one of the earliest trade unions in India. Formerly known as 'Labour Association' the trade union at Jamshedpur, as elsewhere, was born out of workers suffering and sacrifices caused by prolonged strike which ultimately resulted in the increase of wages, introduction provident fund and, above, above all recognition of the Labour association. In 1922 when the union launched a strike for securing certain basic demand like security of service, better service conditions, etc. The strike failed. The labour at Jamshedpur soon drew all India leaders. Gandhiji visited in 1925. The recognition of the union was restored. Subhas Chandra Bose was inducted into the organization as president. With the appearance of Prof. Abdul Bari in 1936 the movement took deep roots. A psychological trust was given to the movement when he changed the name of the Labour association to 'Tata workers'

union'. In 1940 'The Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee' submitted a report by which constituted the first authentic document on labour situation in Bihar in general and at Jamshedpur in particular. During 1945-1946 several strikes occurred at Jamshedpur. An agreement signed in February by the union and management which secured higher wages, better working condition etc. Tata workers' union leaders actively took part in Indian freedom movement since 1928 to 1942. In 1920 to 2008 a total 19 agreements signed between TISCO and Tata Workers' Union¹². In 1929 there was a strike occurred in the Tinsplate company of Golmuri, a suburb of Jamshedpur.

NATURE OF LABOUR POLITICS OF MANBHUM:

The labour movement of Manbhum in this phase illustrates the nature of nationalist intervention of state, managements union and workers, in the declining year of colonial power. During the eventful decade of the thirties, worker of Chotonagpur many of them first generation employees underwent a painful learning process, in the course of which employees great and small, began reluctantly to concede a more democratic system of labour relation. The struggle for democratic industrial relation and against intensification of labour was central to the history of the labour movement of Manbhum, and had their own practical expressions and consequence. In the context of a national movement committed to displacing the colonial bureaucracy, the insubordination of the working class at certain moments resonated with and others diverged from that of the Indian elite, who needed to maintain the principle of managerial authority even as they challenged the authority of the British, to stabilize their rule over labour even as they sought to replace the ruling class¹³. If we consider the major periods of labour unrest 1920-22, 1927-31 and 1937-39, we can discern three recurrent concerns in their agitation. The demand that management respect their choice of leaders, that if refrain from the use of direct or indirect intimidation and that working condition be altered. Underlying all these was the rejection of colonial, capitalist, and racial domination. Their understanding of these phenomena may have been partial. In addition, they had to contend with the often invisible form of manipulation and connivance between leaders, official and managements. However, a survey of their most backward elements such as miners, contract workers, to the skilled metallurgical operative, possessed democratic expectation which had been influenced by the political climate of the time, and to which they contributed by the very fact of their combination.

3. CONCLUSION

In mid 18th century gradually switched over from cottage industry to factory system in India and that resulted in birth of industrial labour. From very inception of the factory system labourers were being deprived of minimum wages and employee benefits and service programmed. Deprivation and suppression induced the working class to be united to form trade union organization. Labour leaders and politicians had to undergo a long struggle to give a solid to the Trade union. Continuous pressure and joint movement by the workers and political persons, different labour commission were formed for the improvement of the socio-economic condition of the working class. And finally Trade union act of 1926 was passed¹⁴. That act, gave the fundamental right of freedom of association which was denied by the employer. Thus trade union organization got legal recognition. After the Second World War political and ideological conflict of left and right intensified globally which had its influence in India as well as in Manbhum.

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