

Chapter I

Introduction

Indian Railways started its journey in 1853. It is the single largest state owned and state operated system in Asia. It has contributed enormously in the making of modern India. It had tied the vast population of the country into a single thread. The Indian Railways is also the heart and life blood of the country which has contributed in the growth of the industrial sector and the country's economy. The Indian Railways however was not able to bring any change or develop the livelihood of the working people. The Indian Railways, even after the transfer of power had followed the same pattern of structural and financial policies which the British administrators had adopted to manage the industry in the country. After independence the policy makers of the country realised that for rapid economic development, the transportation industry, especially the railways had to play a very significant role. For transporting goods especially raw materials from agricultural belt to the factories or up to the production units, the railways were much needed. The railways always transported finished products to the markets.

The railways worked at its maximum capacities after independence. Enormous traffic volumes both passengers and goods traffic compelled the workers to work without limiting the time, which exhausted them largely and especially working in the coastal and mountain areas where weather conditions fluctuate very frequently and during the rainy season of heavy rainfall. It was really inhuman to work for 16-18 hours per day continuously. The Central Government employees abide by the recommendations of the Central Pay Commissions. During 1960s to 1970s Indian economy was worst hit by the inflationary crisis, price rise of essential commodities which led to fall in real wages. Hence sporadic labour unrests became common in different parts of the country.

1960, 1968 and 1974 were the years of major struggles launched by the Central Government employees and especially by the railway workers and amongst these three the most violent and strong was the strike of 1974 led by the railwaymen. This strike lasted for three weeks. The railway workers asserted their power and strength over authoritarianism

and had emerged as a symbol of solidarity and unity of the entire working class of the country. It began on 8th May, 1974 with a Charter of Demands which incorporated demands like wage parity with the workers of other public sector undertakings, need based minimum wage, revision of D.A. formula, bonus, working hours and some other issues. The government had brutally suppressed the railway workers' struggle by dismissing or removing them from services, arresting the workers even before the strike began, unleashing immense torture and harassment on the employees and their families.

But the railwaymen had considered this strike as a successful struggle of the trade unions because it exhibited spontaneous participation of the rank and file workers, ranging from skilled to unskilled, educated to illiterate, lower to higher income workers and revealed the authoritarian nature of administration of the Indian democratic government. It also showed the efforts of organisation, power of cooperation and coordination which were achieved all over the country and touched the vast population of the subcontinent without limiting the geographical boundary of the nation. The twenty days long strike had totally halted the economic and political pace of the country. Railways had suffered a loss of one hundred and fifty crores, people faced huge inconveniences, prices of essential commodities had soared like anything, normal, daily life of the Indians was disrupted, as power stations were not able to provide required amount of electricity to the local areas due to the immobility of the railway traffic.

After independence in India the working class movement had been led by four different centres of the trade unions; All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and the Centre for Trade Unions (CITU). The AITUC was the oldest national trade union formed in October 1920 but it faced several splits. CITU was the result of this split in 1970. In the railway industry the All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) was the first organised union founded in 1925 and it was affiliated to the AITUC but it left the affiliation in 1929. AIRF was mainly dominated by the socialists. There was another prominent trade union which was active in the railway front e.g., National Federation for Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) controlled by the Congress. Indian Railways were divided into nine zones. The railway trade unions were not independent but were guided and directed by their political parties.

They never opposed the decisions of the authority for their own interest to remain in their position. Interestingly the state had provided the trade unions a legal platform to voice the workers' demands. The state perceived that the trade unions must act at the medium between the management and the workers to maintain industrial peace and healthy relation. The trade unions were supposed to satisfy both the authority and the labour to work and co-operate each other for industrial harmony. The trade unions in this country had the immense pressure from both the parties – e.g., to maintain its support base it needed the workers' assistance and to sustain in its legitimate position, they required to negotiate with the management.

After independence the most important shift which took place in the railway industry, was in the locomotives. Powerful diesel and electric locomotives were introduced and steam engines were replaced and this process was almost complete by the end of the 1970s. Introduction of diesel locomotives not only replaced the system but also curtailed the scope of job opportunity. These issues influenced to a great extent and were responsible for the emergence and growth of craft sentiment or categorical councils or craft based associations in the railway industry. There were a number of such craft based unions that existed in the railways. e.g., All India Station Masters' Association, The Guards' Council, Indian Railways Signal and Telecommunication Staff Associations etc., but the most important of these, was the All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA) which was the amalgamation of these craft unions of the loco staff in the Railways. AILRSA had launched various movements which included strikes, go slows, mass sick leave, work to rule and the most significant of them was the strikes of 1973 August and December.

The diverse type of works generated diverse types of discontentment's which were mainly economic in character and the others type of discontentment were the unfavourable working and living conditions, working hours etc. The workers had huge grievances regarding the wage structure, bonus, working hours and several other local issues. And these gave rise to craft based category wise unions which launched a series of agitations and some of which got success too. In this situation the crisis in working class unity was noticed. The situation was that the railway workers while getting disenchanted with the reformist leadership of the AIRF were in the danger of falling under the influence of the category-wise Associations. Meantime, some changes in the AIRF leadership had been brought forward

and in its annual conference, George Fernandez was elected as the President of the union. In 1972-73, the entire period experienced a number of struggles and movements in the different sectors of Indian economy.

To identify the discontentment by the management was actually a very difficult task because railways involved multiple grades, occupations, hierarchical positions and the complex institutional structure spreading over the country – Zonal, Divisional and Local levels although joint consultative machineries were set up to settle the grievances of the workers. Trade unions must be the device of ventilating the workers' disappointments and voice the demands. But in the Indian Railways the trade union leaders always preferred to deal directly with the authority, not to move collectively. These kinds of responses from the recognised unions had increased the trouble among the rank and file workers. It led to frequent wildcat strikes that started to take place locally all over the country in all the railway zones on local primary issues and incidents, but sometimes they reflected excessive variety of resentments. Kerr finds that a strike in Bihar began on February 3rd, 1971 when station masters, cabin men (signal cabins) and switchmen spontaneously quit work after the wife of a cabin man was assaulted by a member of the Railway Protection Force (RPF). In this incident nearly 20,000 employees of E.R had agitated and traffic services throughout the Eastern region was seriously disrupted. This agitation ended on 10th February when the management promised to take measures against the offending RPF personnel and no disciplinary action had been initiated against the strikers (Kerr, 2012; p.174).

According to labour historians the most significant and prominent among all strike actions that had ever taken place in the Indian Railways was the Railwaymen's Strike of May 1974. As Sherlock had put it "the 1974 general strike in the Indian Railways has entered the history and folklore of the greatest mobilisations in the history of organised labour movement in India (Sherlock, 2001; p.3). Some historians criticised the strike as a move of opportunism and petty game of money and power politics for those who treated these types of agitations as nothing but a source of prospect in political life and capturing power. It was held that in the grim of deep economic crisis of the country such agitations were nothing but the steps to dislocate the smooth functioning of the country's political process and the workers fell prey to the encouragement of the opportunistic revolutionary leadership of the trade unions. They used the semi-starving working class to a large extent to

serve the purposes of both the political parties – opposition and ruling party who had let the strike take place and created such an atmosphere that the strike became inevitable. Between the two recognised unions, NFIR had never played any optimistic role to project the resentments and demands of the workers or to fight against the authority. They never afforded to build any relation on the basis of consensus and as a result the railwaymen always confronted with the obstacles of loyalty and lack of class consciousness as a whole. AIRF also did not dare to go against the authorities in the fear of losing the recognition and tried to strike a balance between the two which annoyed the railwaymen and they became impatient due to the inactiveness of the trade unions.

At this juncture the leadership of the AIRF decided to form a common platform of the railwaymen of all political colours and had to bring them under one umbrella. National Coordination Committee of Railwaymen's Struggles (NCCRS) was formed to launch a mass movement for raising the demands of the railwaymen. It called a convention to unite all the railway unions – regional, zonal, local and categorical. For conducting day to day works, a smaller committee known as Action Committee was set up at all the levels of Zonal, Divisional and Local levels. The united platforms of railway trade unions, i.e., NCCRS gave an ultimatum to settle the demands or it would have gone for major nation-wide general strike for indefinite period from the first week of May. It urged the railwaymen to unite and bring absolute solidarity so that they could compel the railway management to discuss and accept their demands. But the government did not show any willingness to settle the issue. Rather it had started preparing itself and planned the strategies to combat the strike.

Some critics said that the government led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi had, to some extent let the strike happen. As Link stated that “the large number of steps announced by the Railway Minister”, L. N. Mishra to “meet the strike situation, make it evident that this was biggest strike action in the history of the Indian Railways since its inception” (Link, 12.5.1974; p.8). The government had raised questions regarding the position of the railway unions and the reasonableness of the workers' demands and thus in this situation the Railway strike became inevitable. The most peculiar and unethical step that the government had taken was the arrest of the President of NCCRS. George Fernandez on 2nd May 1974. This attitude of the government was extremely contradictory and in contrast to their willingness of settling the issues with the railway trade unions in the negotiating table.

Indian Railways is known as the life line of the country. Hence the May 1974 general strike of twenty days had really halted the economic, social and political pace of the country. It might be the biggest struggle of the Indian working class involving nearly twenty lakh railwaymen. On the first day of the strike, it was found that no train had moved both from Howrah and Sealdah stations, the strike was complete. Sherlock had described that “throughout the Southern Railway, especially in Madras, workers left their posts and paralysed train services; ten thousand workers from the Integral Coach Factory at Perambur marched in procession to demonstrate outside the Southern Railway’s General Manager’s office, stopping only because they were obstructed by police; the press reported various kinds of actions at many different centres, including to name just a few, Lucknow, Amritsar, Kanpur, Jhansi, Ahmedabad, Izatnagar, Katihar, Ajmer and Jamalpur, the Coordinating Committee at Gorakhpur wrote that the “workers in the railway workshops at Jamalpur downed tools on 6th May when they heard their pay from the previous month was to be withheld” and there was a total strike in the case of N.F Railways from 7th May” (Sherlock, 2001; pp.363-64).

The impact of the strike was manifold and far reaching. It was estimated that the Railways had to bear the loss of one hundred and fifty crores. But although the railwaymen’s strike was of great importance and occupied a significant position in the entire history of labour movement of the country, still there is not much work in this area. The struggle was considered as a major industrial dispute of India and this would be understood by the way that as soon as it was called off the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet held a meeting and a threadbare discussion took place on the question of revision of wage structure of the railwaymen and the income of the industrial workers in general and central government employees under public sector undertakings. The Government gave its attention on the long ignored grievances and demands of the railwaymen.

Various incidents took place during the 1974 strike which should be brought into light. This study is on the railway workers movement of May 1974. Several general questions arise on the strike of 1974. The general questions which arise are: What were the reasons behind the railwaymen’s strike of May 1974? How did the railway workers and their trade unions prepare for launching an indefinite strike? How did the workers respond towards the strike call? How did the unrecognised unions reciprocate with the strike call of

recognised trade unions? How did the new generation of railway workforce respond to the strike call? How did the unorganised sector of railway industry get involved in this struggle? How did the workers of Eastern and Northeast Frontier Railways prepare themselves for a general strike? What was the situation in Eastern and N.F Railways during the strike period? What was the reaction of the State towards the strike? How did the Management of the Eastern and N.F Railways respond to the striking railway workers? What was impact of the strike in these two Zones? What was the political and economic background of the country at that point of time? What were the tasks of the trade unions after the withdrawal of the strike? Was the strike of 1974 a conscious effort of the working class in India? Though the above are the general questions which arise but the questions which have been taken up in this study are:

1. What were the grievances of the railway workers?
2. How did the railwaymen and their trade unions in the Eastern and N.F Railways prepare for an indefinite strike?
3. What was the situation that prevailed in the Eastern and N.F Railways during the strike days?
4. What were the impact of the May 1974 strike in the Eastern and N.F Railways?
5. How did the State react towards the working class struggle in India?

Literature Review

Surprisingly answer to these questions or adequate answers to these questions are not found in the literature that is available on the strike of the railway men. There are plenty of works on the labour movement in India, but surprisingly there are only very few studies available on the Indian Railway strike of 1974. It seems that it had not attracted the attention of labour historians. There are very few books and articles on the subject, in this study we review few works written on the Railwaymen's struggle of May 1974 and few which are indirectly related to the subject. We review the books first and then the articles. The review is being

attempted to ascertain whether the questions which we have raised in the subject have been adequately answered or not.

Even after more than 35 years of the strike the book “The Indian Railways Strike of 1974: A Study of Power and Organised Labour” written by Stephen Sherlock remains the most significant one. It was published in 2001. Sherlock’s book is divided into three parts. The first part is entitled as “Coercion, Co-option and Revolt” and it contains four chapters—the first chapter introduces the entire work. In the second chapter Sherlock deals with the railway workers’ unions and management from 1925 to 1970. The chapter analyses three areas; e.g. (i) the railway men (ii) their unions and (iii) the railway management. Sherlock points out that railways was the first industry established in India by the colonial rulers in 1853. The work force after independence till 1975 consisted of nearly 15 lakhs regular and 2.8 lakhs casual workers. But strangely enough there were only two recognised unions that existed in the railway front to represent this huge number of workers. These two unions were All India Railway men’s Federation (AIRF) and the National Federation of Indian Railway men (NFIR). The central theme of this chapter is that as the Indian Railways were a public sector undertaking with a separate ministry, the management enjoyed more autonomy than any other sectors. The Railway Board took up the policy of inclusion of the railway unions into their management so that there should not arise any question of discontentment among the workers. But in the later part of the 1960s labour unrests in the railways increased like anything due to the irresponsible policies of the authority and inactiveness of the railway union.

In the third chapter Sherlock describes the emergence of category wise unions working in the railways during the period of 1970-72. The most important category union was the Loco Running Staff Association. Their association conducted several strike action mainly for the reduction of working hours as the loco staff were described as “continuous workers” of the railways. AIRLSA confronted with the police force and with the authority in many cases. During the period of 1970-72, Sherlock has shown that AIRLSA was successful in establishing itself throughout the country—central, zonal and local levels. The fourth chapter deals with different craft unionism that existed in the Indian Railways. The craft unions like station Master Association, or Indian Railways Signal and Telecommunication Staff etc. were actively operating in the railway front. They organised several actions during

the 1960s to 1970s. According to Sherlock the existence of craft unions meant that trade union movement in India was in its premature stage which must have a negative impact on the larger trade union or labour movement in the country.

The second part of the book – “Leadership and control” contains three chapters. First chapter discusses the responses of the trade union towards the workers grievances. Several category wise or craft unions played an effective role in building membership base throughout the country. NFIR never supported any strike struggle throughout the years of late 1960s for early 1970s. The leaders of NFIR were criticised for its inactiveness to meet the workers demands and also for its loyalty to the Management. The workers symbolised the NFIR as the powerless unit. In this chapter Sherlock also discusses the position of the AIRF. AIRF was also not able to build broad support base because from the very beginning it tried to keep personal relationship with the individual workers. But it also tried to change its attitude after observing the success of category unions. Sherlock examined how AIRF had prepared itself for a bigger action and tried to claim its class identity.

In the second chapter Sherlock tries to locate the position of the management and the workers offensive of 1973-74. The most import offensive of the workers was the existence of clear discrimination between the common workforce and the supervisory level though we know that the Indian Railways were a state owned concern. Worker skilled or semiskilled or unskilled did never get promotion at the managerial or supervisory level. Railway Board recruited the high officials from outside. Parallel discontentment also grew among the officials due to the unwanted interference of the politicians in the railway policy making process and administration.

The Third chapter explains the Herculean tasks of uniting 15 lakhs permanent and 2.8 lakhs casual workers by the recognised unions. It was really a difficult job to bring all these workers into a common platform for launching any major movement. Therefore they had engaged themselves in motivating the workers by bringing several issues like deteriorating economic conditions of the country in 1973-74. AIRF decided to launch a general strike in 1974. Thus, the AIRF took a resolution for strengthening its organisational structure and to unite all the unions existed in the railways - craft, category – central, zonal, local. AIRF wanted to bring all the category unions into its purview due to their recent

success in 1973. Sherlock showed that the unity ultimately was achieved in the early months of 1974.

The third part of the book entitled “Workers, Unions and The State” consists of three chapters. The first one deals with the nature of the struggle launched by the workers during 8th May to 28th May 1974. It describes the nature and extent of the repression unleashed by the Government. Sherlock stated that National Coordination committee for Railwaymen’s struggle was formed on 27th February to unite all the trade unions and their members for the preparations of a general strike. And Sherlock had shown that NCCRS was successful and over it lakh of workers engaged in public utility department united together to launch a joint action against the authority. Sherlock pictures the scene of different railway stations, workshops, movement of trains, attendance of the workers etc. He analysed how this strike struggle of the Indian railway men halted the heart beat and life blood of the national economy. The Government implemented Maintenance of Internal Security or MISA and Defence of India Rule (DIR) to turn the strike. Heavy security force like BSF, CRPF etc. were employed to compel the workers for joining their duties. Sherlock also pointed out how the other industries had suffered due to the total disruption of train services. The industries which were mostly affected were steel, Agriculture, coal etc. However, the Government ultimately got victory over the railway workers.

In the second chapter Sherlock examined the impact of the 20 days long strike. He described that from the very beginning of the strike, the Government treated the strike as a challenge to its authority and wanted to show its ability to handle the strike. Sherlock in this chapter portrays the uncomfortable condition of different trade unions belonging to different ideological base during the entire course of the strike. The NFIR was directly Congress controlled railway trade union. AITUC was CPI’s trade union wing and it was in a very unpleasant situation because the CPI supported the congress parliamentary party from outside to from the government. For the CPI (M) this strike was an opportunity to show its strength in certain parts of the country. But the CPI (M) was not in favour of launching such a big strike; because first of all, all the credit of leading such a struggle was taken away by George Fernandes. According to the trade union leaders the strike was not a political fight but a fight to keep the economic rights of the workers. Sherlock called the strike as the “Politics of class”. Sherlock’s book is no doubt a scholarly work on the railway strike of

1974. After 25 years of the strike Sherlock made an effort to picture the real conditions of the workers and the position of the Government.

The book “Trade Union Movement in Indian Railways” written by Mahesh Kumar Mast published in 1969 by Meenakshi Publication is a valuable work for understanding the origin, growth and characteristics of trade unions in the Indian Railways. It is a good book to understand the course of labour movement in the Indian Railways in the pre and post independent era. It attempts to locate the performance of the railway trade unions in respects of achieving broad based unity to shape bigger trade union movement in the country. This book furnishes information regarding the types of early phase of labour resistances, their causes of disappointments and trade union movements during the colonial period.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter “The Movement: Genesis and Growth” describes the origin of the industrial working class with the advent of the railway industry. According to Mast, railways created huge employment opportunity in the industrial sector in the colonial era which was a substitute to the agricultural economy. The author here discusses the characteristics of labour force in the railway industry before 1947. Difference in behaviour created racialism and communalism which led to frequent incidents of workers’ resistances. But interestingly different categories of workers reacted against the authority but it was not collective and united. This decision brought fragmentation in the workers’ agitations which ultimately weakened the power and strength of the working class to the author.

In the second chapter Mast had tried to analyse the history of labour movement in Indian Railways and how qualitative changes had occurred in this course. This chapter had mainly explained how employment increased with the expansion of the railway system in colonial India. He explained how the number of unions started growing e.g., the Bombay, Baroda and Central Indian Railway Employees’ Association, Eastern Bengal Railway Employees’ Association, the Madrass and Southern Maratha Railway Employees’ Union etc. In chapter three the author talks about the various types and categories of trade unions formed and functioned in the railways since the colonial period. Different categories of the workers formed their own organisation to get their demands fulfilled. In the 1950s the communists faced a considerable obstruction when in 1953 the National Federation of

Indian Railwaymen's Federation got its recognition from the Railway Board as an affiliated trade union of INTUC. The main challenge before the trade union leaders was to launch a major movement on the basis of broad based unity and solidarity of the workers.

In chapter five he highlighted management-labour relations in the railway industry. During the years 1949-50 the Railway Ministry stressed upon the importance of the working class and argued that a cordial relationship between the management and the workers must exist to increase the efficiency of the industry, production and growth of the public utility sector. Railway Board emphasised on formation of several negotiating machineries to find out the issues of disagreements between the two. Chapter six is divided into two sections. First section since Independence I (INRWF) and the second section Labour Movement since Independence II (NFIR) focused on the rise of the trade unions, their activities and movements. The author had pointed out that a large section of the railway workers had joined INRWF but initially it faced lot of challenges to exist and remain active in the railway industry. It got its recognition in November, 1949. In the second section – Labour Movement since Independence – II (NFIR) focused its attention on the nature, activities and role of NFIR since its inception in the course of trade union movement in the country. In chapter seven, which is a conclusion he mentions the importance of the trade unions which had been an integral part of any industrial system. He concludes by referring to the concept of responsibility to pursue the “welfare economy and socialist pattern of society” as the objective of the democratic country.

“The book Great Railway Strike and After” is a book written by Nrisingha Chakraborty, published in 1975 by CITU Publication. The author was a member of the Action Committee of NCCRS. This book is full of information regarding the May 1974 general strike of the Indian Railwaymen. In this book the author compiled the developments and incidents that led the railway workers to go a strike against their authority. It is a brief study of the nature of the trade union activities in the railway industry. It also examine workers resistance in the Indian Railways. Chakraborty have narrated the brutalities of the railway authority and the force which they utilised against the workers during the twenty days long strike in May 1974. He describes the hardships of the railwaymen after the withdrawal of the strike and the victimisation by the railway administration. He discusses the role and the responsibilities of the trade unions after the withdrawal of the strike. This

book had sketched the attitude of the state towards the working class of the country. This book is a unique document in respect of the Railwaymen's strike.

The author, in this book comments also on the issue of solidarity of the railway workers which was to him historical and unprecedented. All the rank and file workers of railway industry agreed to participate in this strike even those who were not directly involved they had sympathy and support towards the strikes. All the Central Government Employees' Associations had shown their solidarity towards this struggle. This book is a beneficial document for understanding the 1974 railwaymen's strike, for those who want to enquire about the preparation of the strike by the trade unions and the attitude and reactions of the government towards the working class agitation in India.

The book "The Railway Strike of 1974 and the Railway Men's Movement" written by George Fernandez is an insightful and informative work which helps to reveal many unknown aspects of trade union movement of Indian Railways. It also unfolds many incidents of May 1974 all India general strike of the railwaymen. This book was published in 1984 by Sindhu Publication. It was actually a lecture on the theme "Leadership and Organisation" delivered by George Fernandez in a seminar organised by the Institute of Social Studies, Hague, Netherlands held on 12th to 16th September 1977. This work is considerably relevant from the perspective of the labour movement of the country. In this study Fernandez said that the basic question of workers' discontentment and their consciousness remained same as it was in the early period of the emergence of the trade unions in India. He agreed on the point that this strike was an exhibition of labour power or the power of the downtrodden who have the capacity to challenge the authority and the might of the state.

In this book the author tried to sketch a brief history of trade unionism in the railway industry, the reasons of workers' immense discontentment towards the trade unions and the authority. He raised those issues which compelled the trade union leaders in the railway industry to take the decision of all India general and indefinite strike in May 1974. He discusses the nature and course of the strike. This book is divided into four sections with one appendix. The first section "A Short History of the Railway Workers' Movement" had discussed about the railway network of the country and how it was important for the Indian

economy. In this chapter the author traced the origin of the trade unions in the railway industry. Many unions were formed in 1920-21 in the railway front e.g., North Western Railways Unions, East Bengal Railway Indian Employees Association, Great Indian Peninsula Railway Staff Union – all of these unions organised a number of agitations for various reasons. These had showed a well knit power of working class of the Indian Railways and interestingly the railways were keen to participate in the mainstream political movement.

Meanwhile in 1925 All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) was formed and almost all the existing unions got affiliated under this union. Here Fernandez sketched a detail picture of the strikes that happened under the aegis of the AIRF leadership throughout the country. In the post war period Jayprakash Narayan became the President of AIRF and hence it became the most dominant union playing a crucial role in the entire history of the labour movement of the country. The author mentioned here that NFIR came into existence in April 1953 which marked a clear division in workers' solidarity. It was formed by the INTUC. In the meantime the recommendation of the Second Pay Commission aggravated the resentments of the railway workers. Thus the Central Government employees including the railwaymen went on an All India General strike from 11th July, 1960 which lasted for five days as the Nehru Government resorted to heavy repression and treated the strike as "anti-national". Again in 1968 there was a 'one day token strike' by the Central Government employees took place. Fernandez pointed out that the disaster of 1968 provided the necessary encouragement to the fragmentation of the workers' union in the railway industry and mushrooming of category wise associations started. In the meantime the AIRF had changed its leadership and George Fernandez became the President of AIRF and it wanted to go on a broad based nationwide movement. Therefore, National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle (NCCRS) was formed to launch a bigger movement.

In Section two "The Railway Strike 1974" is divided into six parts. The first part "The historical background" describes the origin and nature of the AIRF and NFIR. In part two, "Towards the confrontations" Fernandez shared his experience as a trade union leader when launching an indefinite strike in the railway industry. In part three "The Attempt at Negotiation" explain his initiative towards solidarity and also the process of negotiations that took place between the NCCRS and the railway management. The fourth part

“Establishment repression and workers response” discusses the heavy repressive measures that the government resorted to, to meet the railway workers struggle. In the fifth part of this study “An Analysis of the Strike”, the author tried to analyse the entire strike situations in all over the country, problems and difficulties and located the weaknesses of the trade union leadership. The sixth part “The realised potential of the railway workers” informed that the railwaymen had huge potential and occupied the most pivotal position in the history of working class struggle in India. The third section of this book includes certain documents e.g., two letters from the Prime Minister, a letter to Railway Minister, the copy of Frankfurt Speech and declaration, photo state of Frankfurt declaration. The Joint Declaration, AIRF Resolution on the Joint declaration, Deb Kumar Ganguli’s letter and a reply to Deb Kumar Ganguli and a Resolution at the National Convention. Section four of this book contains “A Speech on Some Issues of Railwaymen’s Movement”. It also has an appendix on why Rail Mazdoor Union? Nevertheless, this book is really a huge source of information regarding the 1974 strike by the Indian railwaymen. It shades light on the internal facts and issues of the trade union of the country in general and railway industry in particular. But this book has failed to examine the limitations of the trade unions mainly organised and controlled by the left ideology. It did not unfold the factors which were responsible for the failure of this strike. This work remains sketchy while analysing the characteristic features of the railway trade unions during the strike days. It also lacks academic resourcefulness and excellence.

The book “History of Railway Trade Union Movement: A Study” written by Nrisingha Chakraborty published in 1987 by CITU Publication is an important source for an understanding of a history of Indian railway workers’ movement and also a valuable account of the May 1974 strike of the Indian Railwaymen. This book shades light on the unknown facts regarding the railway trade unions and their role and functions. It also points out the shortcomings and the limitations of the trade union movement of the country during the post-independent period in the railway industry. The author analyses various aspects of trade unions which were affecting the mass movement and their relationship with the employers or the authority. To the author fragmentation of the working class had a harmful impact on the broader perspective of the trade union movement of the country. Chakraborty points out that the historic importance of the struggle of AILRSA in 1974 which increased and built the confidence and strength of the entire segment of the railway workers. The author talks about

the preparation of the railway workers for launching an indefinite strike throughout the country. The measures that were taken by the trade unions were described here in details and the process of solidarity and consolidation of the workers led to the formation of the NCCRS. On 8th May at 6:00 a.m. the strike started and the wheels of the nation had halted completely. He narrated the consequences and the aftermath of the strike of 1974. How huge number of workers permanent or casual were removed from services, suspended, faced break-in-service and arrested under MISA and DIR were described here. He also refers to the strike of 1980 in the railway industry.

There are other books if not directly on the subject but indirectly on the subject. The book “Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1990” by Sukomal Sen, published in 1997 is a valuable source of knowledge regarding the development of capitalism and history of the formation of working class in India. This book is divided into several chapters. Among them few chapters are relevant for the purpose of our study. In the sixth chapter ‘Beginning of Working Class Movement 1850-1900’ he deals with large scale working class protests in this period in India which provided a necessary impetus for the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In Bengal, Maharashtra, Malabar Coast and in several other places riots and revolts started taking place. But most of them were unorganised, scattered and sporadic. Sen in this chapter had noticed that the first strike of industrial workers took place in the railway industry at Howrah Station in 1862. 1200 labourers struck on the demand of 8 hours work a day. Sen referred to several other unrests in this period. In the seventh chapter the author attempted to describe the preparatory phase for organised trade union movement in 1900-1914. National Movement for freedom and different political developments throughout the country played a favourable role for Indian working class. The strike of the workers in Bengal Section of the East Indian Railway in July 1906 was perhaps the biggest organised workers’ agitation during the imperialist rule.

In chapter twenty one he first contends that the working class struggles confronted unprecedented repression from the state in 1971. According to Sen in West Bengal, workers’ unrests became a regular phenomenon and at the same time the government took all repressive measures to break the agitation. Here he analyses the railwaymen’s struggle of 1974. He tried to locate the activities and real intention of the railway trade unions such as

AIRF, NFIR, All India Railway Employees' Confederation, different category-wise unions etc. Railway trade unions of different shades announced a joint convention for realisation of certain common demands and formed NCCRS which decided to call for a united movement. And when the authority refused to negotiate with them, NCCRS launched an indefinite strike from 8th May 1974. The strike was called off after twenty days and it left a far reaching impact on political and economic policies and processes of the government. This strike raised certain vital questions that whether the Indira Gandhi government represented a semi-fascist, authoritarian rule with twenty years of independence. At the end, Sen tried to focus his attention on the government's attempts to control industrial relation and he also raised the question of achieving the trade unions unity for protecting the interest of the industrial workforce of the country.

Ian J. Kerr "Building the Railways of the Raj: 1850-1900" is a very captivating work. It gives an understanding of the history of railway establishment in British India. This book, published in 1997 is an attempt to trace the emergence and growth of working class in the country and the development of industrial capitalism during the early phase of colonial rule. The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the entire study. Chapter two – "Getting Started and Subsequent progress" has dealt with the early phase of the railway establishment in the colonial period. It tried to identify the role of the British Government of India in exercising its supervision and direction relating to building the railways in the country. Chapter three "Contractors, Engineers and Petty Contractors: The Varieties and Problems of Management" concentrates on the process and direction of railway construction in the country and the processes of mobilisation of the workforce and their engagement in various and complex type of works.

In the fourth chapter "Obtaining Labour", Kerr focused mainly on the origin of the railway workforce who built the railways in this early period. The major portion of the unskilled railway workers came from the landless agricultural population and poor artisan class residing in the villages. Skilled workers were needed for constructing bridges, stations, tunnel sites and other sophisticated works. Kerr here observed that during the sowing and harvesting seasons, the railway construction works had faced acute labour crisis especially the crisis of unskilled labourers. The Indian labour which emerged with the advent of railway industry, demonstrated a kind of flexibility of advance capitalism. Chapter V

entitled “Work and Working Conditions” attempted to describe the construction of tunnels, stations, embankments etc. British engineers executed an incredible work by preparing the route map of the Indian sub continent. ‘Shifting duties’ was introduced by this time in India to continue the construction work for round the clock. Kerr also mentioned that the labourers lived in an unhealthy and nasty environment. Not only the living conditions but the Indian workers faced tremendous oppression and immense exploitation during these days.

In chapter six “Workers Resistance” the author sketched the situation in which the workers expressed their agony and protested against their employers. These resistances were not conscious efforts but many times they were only situational and subjective to the particular work site or group of workers concerned. Gradually collective actions started taking place in the railway construction worksites. Since the late 1860s in the Eastern Bengal Railways and in the Southern Railways the incidents of workers’ unrests became frequent. The seventh chapter of this book has concluded the entire study by summarising the findings and issues that Kerr had tried to deal with.

The book ‘Themes in Indian History: Railways in Modern India’ edited by Ian J. Kerr is an extra ordinary source of information on railway history in India. It was published in 2001 by Oxford Publication. To Kerr the railway workers in the British period were well known for their collective action and protest against their colonial employers. Railway workers had resisted their employers against racial policies and causes of the British people.

This book has fourteen chapters. The seventh chapter of this book “Railways in Modern India” by John Hurd demonstrates the role of the railways during 1900s in emerging the market of food grains in the country. The article examines the economic consequences of the railway development in India. Hurd mentioned that the railways opened the opportunity of trading in the foreign markets. Railways immensely expanded the scope of export of several commodities, such as jute, leather, cotton etc. whose growth was really noteworthy. Imports of goods at the same time increased. This article showed how commercialisation had brought many changes in rural areas, life of the village dwellers and economy as well. It had increased the scope of employment opportunity in the country.

The eighth chapter of the book “Economic Change and the Railways in North India, 1860-1914” written by I.D. Derbyshire analysed the effects of railways on the economy of

United Provinces in the late 19th century. The author argues that three aspects contributed towards flourishing of commerce in this region during this period and they were: the transformation from weak to strong administration, secondly, increase in export of agricultural raw materials to Europe after the opening of Suez Canal and thirdly, different infrastructural changes in the sub-continent. Establishment of railways and canal irrigation in North India had improved the nature of agricultural production and exposed the economy to the outside world and also impacted on the population diversities.

Chapter nine by John Harrison is an extremely valuable source for understanding the railway records maintained mainly in North East India and the consequences – economic, physical and social of the railway operations in this region. Railways to him had changed the pattern of existing economic and social system of these regions by expanding the market of crops and other commodities. Harrison looked at how political considerations obstructed the expansion and spread of rail links in this region. Railways to him also effected the labour migration of the northern part of Assam and Far East for establishing plantation industries.

The article on the Indian Railways written by G.S. Khosla had focused its attention on the measures taken by the railway authority towards the regrouping or reorganisation of the Indian Railways after independence. Here, the author concentrated on the organisational steps and methods by the Government of India to increase the efficiency of the railways. Khosla discusses in every details the redistribution and reorganisation of railways especially the management of the railways. It gave emphasis on the policy of decentralisation to deal with the question of corruption. In 1967 the Government of India appointed Administrative Reform Commission which was followed by Railway Reforms Committee to enquire the activities of the railways and recommended for its management. Railway Board remained responsible for control co-ordination, operation and future planning and up gradation of the railways. The Committee advocated for the re-organisation at the divisional level, remodelling of construction units and rolling stock, modernisation of workshops, reshape of financial administration etc. In the conclusion the author referred to the various types of railway funds and the system of railway budget. The articles of the book “Railways in Modern India” edited by Ian. J. Kerr attempted to examine vividly the establishment of Indian Railways from a historical perspective. But it does not look at the working class in

the railway industry. The articles do not concentrate on the issue of economic deprivation and exploitation of the working class in this industry.

The book 'Crowing Glory' written by Nabajyoti Chowdhury, a trade unionist, member of Mazdoor Union of Siliguri Junction Branch, published by Nabajanma Prakashan in February 2004 is an important document to understand the establishment of the Railways in the North Bengal areas and in the Darjeeling hills. It is also a good account of the origin and growth of trade unions and their activities in the railway industry in this region. The author describes how the rural economy of North Bengal got connected with the commercial world through the railways and how the transformation of economy had brought changes to the life of the local people.

This book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter described the construction of Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (DHR) which began its journey from 8th April 1879. The total length of the railway lines from Siliguri to Darjeeling was 88.48 k.m. with the extension of 7.4 k.m. to New Jalpaiguri. The DHR was taken over by the Government of India on 20.10.1948. The author discussed about the building of railways in Teesta Valley, establishment of Assam Rail Line Project, North Eastern Railway and Northeastern Frontier Railways etc. Sri Chowdhuri had illustrated the living conditions of the railway working class living in their entire hilly areas and in the planes of North Bengal.

The second chapter focused on the inevitability of the growth of trade unions in the railway industry in this region. In the pre and post independent era the railway authority resorted to rigorous repressive measures against the railwaymen to handle any kind of workers' agitations. He discusses the aims and objectives of the N. F. Railways Mazdoor Union affiliated to AIRF. They fought for "Terai Allowances" which was much needed for the workers to cope up the extra burden of medical expenditures. In 1960, 1968 and 1973 strikes were successful here. This chapter elucidated the preparation and nature of the May 1974 strike in Siliguri. He discusses the police torture, government's reaction and impact of the strike.

The third chapter "Problems facing in the trade union attempted solution and some notable achievements" tried to analysed the problems of trade unions in railway front, e.g., organisation, functional, procedural, financial problems etc. The author traced the

achievements of trade unions in the Siliguri and also in Kisanganj including the hill sections, e.g., Terai allowances, opening up of a health unit in Siliguri Junction, flood advance in later 1950s and late 1960s, railwaymen's cooperative store etc.

In the fourth chapter, he discusses the brief history of NFRMU of Siliguri branch. Since its inception how it worked and tried to be connected with other zones, how it furnished the demands of the railwaymen and fixed the procedures to bargain with the authority to accomplish them. Sri Chowdhury talked about the preparations of the union during the strikes of 1960, 1968 and 1974. He sketched a short biography of some trade union leaders such as Priya Gupta, Bidhu Sekhar Sen, Rakhal Dasgupta etc. This study was concluded with the information about the Bengal Assam Railway System. This book is a valuable book though it lacks scholarly excellence since the author is a trade union leader.

There are a good number of works on social movements in India. Ghanshyam Shah's (2004) book on 'Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature' is a remarkable one. This was published in 2004. In the introduction Shah has discussed the lack of academic interests in studying political masses, their demands, desires, aspirations, problems, grievances etc. This study refers to the social movements as a deliberative collective action to promote change in any direction – may be illegal or violent. Shah tried to focus on the activities of the mass against the authority or against dominant culture, caste, class etc. The purpose of the movements to him is to transform the society and to attain justice. At the end of this chapter Shah tried to sketch the typologies of the social movements.

The Seventh chapter of the book entitled 'Industrial Working Class Movement' is relevant for the present study. The author describes here that industrialisation process started with the establishment of railway industry in the colonial period and then gradually expanded with jute, cotton, tea or indigo i.e., plantation industry, iron-steel industries in different parts of the country. A large number of workforces mainly non-agricultural were employed in the different industries. To him labour was not only an economic entity but also a social and cultural entity. Trade unions in their early stage were mostly unorganised. Therefore, the movements were sporadic, unorganised and spontaneous. Shah here attempts to address various causes of strikes in India e.g., wage, bonus, leave, retrenchments, recognition of trade unions, inter union disputes, holidays, less working hour, better

infrastructural facilities etc. The author concentrates his attention on the trade union activities and their relationship with the political parties. He also studies the working class leaders and their leaderships of some trade unions like AITUC, INTUC, HMS, CITU etc. Shah concludes this chapter by raising some valuable questions such as whether the working class has the potential to sustain their agitation; whether these movements have developed or stimulated any political consciousness of the workers; or whether the working class is really leading towards economic and social transformation.

The book “Our Indian Railway: Themes in Indian’s Railway History” edited by Roopa Srinivasan, Manish Tiwary and Sandeep Silas published in 2006 is a collection of articles. The articles in this book, mainly examines the reasons behind the need for the first railway construction in India by the colonial rulers. This book is divided into twelve chapters. The relevant chapters for this study are:

Chapter Five “Economic Nationalism and the Railway Debate, Circa 1880-1905” written by Bipan Chandra, deals with the question of how the railway establishment had impacted on the economic, political and cultural aspects of the country during the colonial period. He had analysed the entire theme of the study through the lens of the nationalist discourse. He had sketched a brief history of the past of the Indian railways.

Chapter Seven of this book “Indian Nationalism and Railways” by Vishalakshi Menon and Sucheta Mahajan is an interesting article. This article analyses the relationship between the labour movements in the Indian Railways and the Nationalist movement. The nationalist leaders all along supported the cause of the railway working class and their agitations and it became an integral part of struggle for independence and was considered as political movement. During the Quit India Movement, railway network facilitated the activists to move more quickly from distant places also became a means of publicity.”The Railway in Colonial India: Between Ideas and Impacts” written by Iftekar Iqbal is the Eighth Chapter of this book. This article focussed its attention on the impact of the railways on the Indian society and its environment. He notes that that the railway systems had a great impact on the entire ecological environment of the country. It also affected the traditional society of India which was agrarian.

Chapter Nine of this book “The Dark Side of the Force: Mistakes, Mismanagement and Malfeasance in the Early Railways of the British Indian Empire” written by Ian J. Kerr which provides a fascinating story regarding the different incidents of corruptions, scandals, dishonest expenditure and mismanagement in the railway industry during the early period of its establishment. The article “A View of the History of Indian Railways” written by Mark Tully, is the eleventh chapter of this edited volume. This article portrays the early history of railway establishment in India. The articles in this book provide an analytical overview of the early stage of railway establishment in the colonial India.

The book “27 Down: New Departure in Indian Railways Studies” edited by Ian J. Kerr Published in 2007 by Orient Longman is a collection of articles which increases the knowledge of the readers in the direction of the impact of the Indian Railways in the colonial and post-colonial era. Indian Railways had been functioning since 150 years but still many aspects of the Indian Railways remains undiscovered or rather unnoticed. Kerr here had tried to incorporate those essays which can shade light on the new areas of research. This book contains certain essays which explore the developments of the initial stage of railway constructions, its stretch of lines, route miles etc in the colonial era and after independence how the partition had affected the industry and its impact on the production and partition had imbalanced the existing system to some extent. They also focus on the technical and problem oriented aspects of the railways in the pre and post colonial period. The authors here discuss the economic, political and military developments that took place due to the establishment of the railways in the country and prepared the path to modernisation. To them railways have played a significant role in the country’s developmental programmes. This book which is divided into eight chapters is practically an immense source of information for carrying out further researches to a new direction.

Out of all the chapters the Sixth Chapter is very interesting. “The Railway Workshops and Their Labour: Entering the Black Hole” by I. J. Kerr is a valuable source of understanding about the constituents and characteristics of the railway workforce in the pre-independent India. Kerr divided the workers into several groups based on the language, locality, gender, community, occupation etc. Railways employed varied types of workers such as casual, permanent, skilled, unskilled, low paid-highly paid etc. Here Kerr details the nature of the workers who were engaged in the railway workshops. ‘Race’ was a dominant

feature of the railway construction industry which remained in India throughout the colonial period. This study focussed its attention on the railway workshops and their locations and impact of these on the social composition of the region. Kerr mentioned that Lahore workshop was the focal point of the emergence of industrial working class and introduction of capitalist development of colonial regime. In the opinion of the author it led to the formation of industrial working class in India.

A very fascinating work is by Ian J. Kerr on the establishment and development of the railway system in India. “Engines of Change: The Railroads That Made India” by Ian J. Kerr is a study which provides detailed information regarding the railroad system in India from the colonial period up to 2010. This book was published in 2012 in India. The eighth chapter is entitled “To Serve the Nation: Railroads Independent India – 1947-2010” which is very interesting. The author finally had summed up the entire study by remarking on the development and functioning of railroads in post-independent era and the policies behind it. Kerr has pointed out the grievances of the workers and the relationship between management and employees in the post independent era. Recognised and unrecognised railway unions (NFIR and AIRF) and their affiliated units act as the platform of ventilating discontentment’s become involved in much wider actions. The strike of May 1974 was such an action which shook the might of the state. The book however could have explored in more details the complexities of railway’s past of the country. It does not provide a clear picture about the struggles, hardships and sufferings of the workers’ daily life who actually built the railroads and the sacrifices that only brought changes in the political, economic, cultural and spatial dimensions of India and Indian life. In spite of these shortcomings this work is very fascinating and delightful.

Apart from books there are several articles available on this subject. The article “Railway workers Begin to Organise Themselves” written by D. N. published in ‘Economic and Political Weekly’ on June 16th 1973 is a valuable work on the activities of the trade unions in the Indian Railways. It discusses the various movements led by the category unions throughout the year 1972 and also in 1973. It also noticed that the risks taken by the railway workers, e.g. firemen, lever man etc. were so high and the working hour of these workers was too long that had aggravated the grievances. The workers had resorted to “gheraos”, “mass absenteeism” or strikes. This led to the formation of different types of

category wise unions in the railways. It also revealed the face of the government and its unhealthy ties with the industrial capitalist class to protect their own interest.

The article “Railway strike in Retrospect” published in EPW Vol.-10 No.-3 on 18th January 1975 described the huge strength of the Indian working class during the strike days of 1974. It discussed how the recognised unions’ unhealthy ties with the management caused damage to the working and living conditions of the workers. A peculiar feature in the railway front was observed that there was a mushroom growth of category unions. But the election of George Fernandes as the President of the AIRF in November 1973 marked a significant change in the railway workers’ movement. NCCRS was formed to bring the unions into a common platform to launch a general strike throughout the country. The Government took the threat of strike action as a political challenge and utilised every possible means to turn down the morality and confidence of the railway workers and to break the strike. It showed that the entire working class of India stood beside the railway workers against the entire state. This article unmasked the face of Indian democracy and showed the united strength of the toiling mass of the country.

The article “Railway workers and their Unions: Origin of 1974 Indian Railways Strike” published in Economic and Political Weekly on 14 October 1989 by Stephen Sherlock is a scholarly work. In this article Sherlock stated that Indian railways were the lifeline of the country’s economy and peculiarly the highly unionised workforce of the railways encompassed the major portion of Indian working class. The all India general strike of 1974 that lasted for 20 long days, successfully united all the workers of the Indian Railways. The author described that this was an outburst of long term deprivation and grievances of the workers. In the first section i.e. “workers Grievances” Sherlock describes how the relative decline in income of the railway workers for more than two decades caused the event like a general strike of 1974. In the second section “Recognised Unions” Sherlock discusses the role of the railway trade unions, as we know that railway workers were mostly unionised. At the all India level there were two recognised unions in the railway front – one was the AIRF dominated by the socialists and the other was the NFIR dominated by the Congress.

In the third section “Challenge of Category Unions” Sherlock discussed the attitude of various categories of railway workers belonging to the various unions. In August 1970 various categories of organisations united and co-ordinated into All India Loco-running Staff Association. From 1970-73 AILRSA launched several actions and in some cases they were successful in getting concessions from the authority. In the fourth section “Recognised Unions’ Response” Sherlock described how the success of category unions forced the recognised unions to become active in the railway front. In the fifth section, “Towards A General Strike” Sherlock gave a detail description of the preparation of the Railway General Strike of 1974. He described how and why George Fernandes was selected and elected as the President of AIRF in September 1973. National Convention of Railwaymen had adopted a charter of demands which the Union Government refused to accept not only that, it even refused to negotiate with the railway unions. This made the situation to launch a combined action of the workers of all colours. In the last section of the article “Railway Strike and Trade Union Movement in India” Stephen Sherlock discussed the nature of the strike, the role played by the recognised unions and government reactions to it. He states that there was a general feeling in support of the railway strike amongst almost all the working people of the country.

“The Historic Railway Strike of 1974” written by B.T. Ranadive published in the Journal “The Railway Workers”, Vol. VI., No. 3, May-June, 1999 provides a brief analysis of the contribution of the railway industry to the country’s economy during the early decades of 1970s and the resistances of railwaymen against the authority. It also describes the responses of the railway administration and their attitude to the working class. It details the inhuman attack by the government on the railway workers when they struck against the authority in May, 1974. It raised the question how could it spend crores of rupees on the atomic explosion and a huge tax relief to the capitalists and the landlords. It examined the industry-wise system of productions, its outcome and benefits to get the complete picture of the economic status of the country. To him the railway workers contribute hugely to the national purse or keep the country’s wheel moving, thus they had the right to have a share from it.

“The Historic Railway Strike of 1974: A Great Lesion” written by Samar Mukherjee published in the same journal. He examined the strike preparation, background of the strike

and the performance of the trade unions after the strike. He tried to locate the position of this struggle in the labour history of the country. Mukherjee attempted to find out the reasons behind the weakness of the railway workers' movement. He told that the government had compelled the railwaymen to go on strike, it created such an atmosphere that the railway trade unions had to launch an indefinite strike in May, 1974. According to Mukherjee the government did not have any intention to negotiate with the railwaymen or to accept their demands. In the concluding part, he made some suggestions for future trade union movement in the country especially, if it had to combat with the undemocratic government like this.

“Silver Jubilee of May 1974 Twenty Days Heroic Strike of Railwaymen – A Tribute to Martyrs” written by J. P. Chaubey published in 1999 is a valuable document about the all India general strike of the Indian railwaymen in May, 1974. Chaubey focus his attention on the preparation of the strike by the railway trade unions, process of negotiation with the government; government's reactions towards the workers' resistances, overall impact of the strike. He felt that broad based unity of the workforce is needed and also their leaders should be united, all kinds of rivalry must be set aside if they have desires to continue their struggle in future and launch bigger movements. Chaubey described the government's plan of action during the strike days which led the workers to suffer immensely. In the conclusion the author offered his gratitude to those workers who had sacrificed their lives for the greater cause of the working class of the country and set an example for future course of action.

“Railwaymen's Strike of 1974: An Unprecedented Event of Indian Trade Union Movement” written by N.S. Bhangoo, a trade union leader of the railways, published in 1999 is an examination of the role and place of the trade union in the railway industry before the strike of 1974. The two recognised unions of the railway workers – AIRF and NFIR had failed to perform their expected responsibilities and duties to maintain a minimum balance between the employees and employers relationship. Hence, frustrations among the workers had generated and increased enormously. The author here states that the Loco Running Staff Association was formed only out of these frustrations. He analysed the negotiation process that was initiated by the government and the trade unions to settle the issue. Bhangoo ended his article by criticising the policies of the authority – especially the economic and political

policies of the then government. He favoured the policy of bringing the industrial workers in mainstream politics.

The article “25th Anniversary of Great 1974 Railway Strike” by S.K. Dhar, leader of railway trade union is a valuable contribution to the documentation of the labour movement of the railway industry in this country. He begins with the demands of the railwaymen and the reasons for their disappointment. Dhar commented on the dynamic leadership of AILRSA which fulfilled some demands of the Loco Running Staff. Dhar stated that the decision of changing the AIRF leadership was the most crucial decision at that point of time. According to Dhar the preparation for the indefinite strike was not adequate but all the organisations and the trade unions exhibited solidarity with this struggle. Dhar explained the reasons behind the withdrawal of the strike. In the conclusion he tries to find the limitations which hindered the railwaymen to reach their goal.

“1974 Railwaymen’s Historic Strike” written by Dilip Mukherjee provides information regarding the preparations of the May 1974 railwaymen’s strike. It also talks about the nature of the struggle in the Eastern Railways. The article also tries to interpret the consequences and outcome of the strike. He concentrates on the developments in the Eastern region. To him though the strike was withdrawn unconditionally, it had long term impact on the railway authority and labour movement of the country. The author ends with the conclusion that the trade unions should have learnt from this experience that the workers should be more united and their organisation must reach solidarity on the basis of collective consensus.

The articles reviewed above were written by the trade union leaders mainly based on their experiences and participation. These articles reflect the ground realities of the strike and what actually had happened in the different railway zones during and before the struggle. Though they are good articles on the strike but they suffered from biasness since they described the incidents from the leftist standpoint. These essays are not even scholarly. Despite of this they are really useful articles on the subject.

The article ‘Forty Years After The Great Indian Railway Strike of 1974’ written by Ranabir Samaddar, is a good source of information about the nature and the consequences of the railway workers’ struggle in May 1974. It was published in Economic and Political

Weekly, Volume 1 No. 4 on 24th January 2015. He analysed the different contentious issues behind the strike, for example long working hour of the railwaymen, salary and wage structure, D.A question and also the bonus issue. He analyses the role of the major trade unions e.g. NFIR and AIRF in consolidation of railway working class in the early period of independence. Railway management established the conciliation machinery like Railway Board and Corporate Enterprise Group of Management to ventilate their grievances and suggest measures for improving the situation and reinstate industrial peace.

The author here writes several stories on the basis of the experiences of the administrative officers that how they handled the situation during the strike days in May 1974 and how they managed to run the trains and tried to keep normalcy in the stations. The legendary unity that this movement had achieved during this period had never been seen before and after the strike. This paper had attempted to point out the causes of the failure of the strike. It highlights how the Indian government repressed brutally the striking workers and compelled them to join their duties. The author concluded his study by raising some questions regarding whether the railway workers again could be able to regain their lost glory and attain the consciousness of the working class, whether a tradition of militancy and heroic struggle could bridge solidarity of the working class.

The article “Remembering May 1974: The Historic Railway Workers’ Strike” written by Krishna Ananth published in Economic and Political Weekly, May, 2016, Vol. L 22 is an important source of information about the Railway workers’ strike of 1974. The author gives a general overview of the reasons, nature and the consequences of the railway workers strike of May 1974. He talked about the railway trade unions in detail, e.g., existence of different types and categories of unions in various railway zones. He tried to find out the economic reasons which actually instigated the workers to raise their voice against the authority. Ananth had discussed how George Fernandez stepped in the leadership of the railway trade unions and led the agitation, how the NCCRS was formed and how it attempted to co-ordinate with the railway trade unions. This study had analysed the activities and responses of the railway management during the strike days in the month of May 1974. Railway authority claimed that normalcy remained in almost all the zones except some sporadic incidents which were reported in few places. Railway Board, from the very first day resorted to repressive tactics to crush the movement and tried to localise the agitation

through the means of brute force and strength. He concluded his discussion by mentioning the various activities of the trade unions who actually supported the railwaymen's causes of the struggle and also referred to those who in fact betrayed the striking workers.

The article "The pattern of Railway Development in India" by Daniel Thorner (1955) provides valuable information regarding the history of railway development in British India up to independence. What surprises Thorner, is that undivided India which is un-industrialised has a great railway network in comparison with other countries like USA, Russia or Germany. India was under British colonial rule, but the term 'Colonial' did not suit here because India was seen much too large, populous and diverse to be a colony. Thus, establishment of railways in India was decided in London with the intention to intermingle the economies of the two countries. The promotion of railways in India had brought greater overseas market and better sources of raw materials for the British merchants. It also could serve the administrative and military purposes.

The first railway building was undertaken by the East India Railway company (EIR) operating the lines running north from Calcutta. Simultaneously the Great, The Indian Peninsula Railway Company started constructing lines from Bombay to Kalyan. Thorner here, points out to the clash between the Government of India and the railway builders and contractors. After the Great Indian Rebellion in 1857-58 greater emphasis was given upon the speedy growth of railway construction. Thus, the years of 1860s became the boom years for the British engineers and builders and above all huge British capital was flown to India. Thorner said that the governmental policy might have impeded the growth and efficient functioning of the railways. All the expenditure of the railways on repair, renewal, extension and development was placed under the control of Finance department whose primary duty was to balance the Governments' budget. Thus, in this process the appropriation for maintenance and improvement was reduced. Railways had to suffer from severe under capitalisation. In 1924, the Government of India implemented the new phase of railway organisation under complete state ownership and state management. In this system the "Buy British" policy was converted into "Made in India" policy. Thorner pointed out that India's railway development was massive but not proportionate.

The article “Railway workers prepare for Struggle” (1977) tried to analyse the cause of the workers’ demands and reasons of massive rallies of railway worker that had taken place in Delhi. The railways workers felt both cheated and insulted on the question of bonus. After coming to power in 1977 the Janata Government refused to take any decision on the bonus question. The denial of bonus is not only the urgent question but another long standing demand was to give permanent employment to the lakhs of casual workers. The wages of the workers were very low and they demanded security of service that was enjoyed by the permanent workers. The track maintenance, permanent way gangs, transshipment operation, loading coal in engines tender etc all these works were done by the casual workers.

This article focused its attention on the issue of longer hour of work of the railway workers. Though the International Labour Convention had treated the railways as industry, but the Government of India had denied them the status of industrial workers. As a result they were denied full trade union rights, different regulations of working hour etc. During the emergency the railway workers were worst affected. Transfer, suspension etc, were greatly used against them. From this article the author wants to make it clear that the change of Government did not bring any change in the railway front.

The article “The Madras and Southern Marhatta Railway Strike: 1932–33” (1980) by C.S. Krishna provides a detailed account regarding the railway workers movement in pre-independence (1932-33) India. It discusses about the number of employees that southern railway had employed at that point of time – almost 15000 workers who were best organised also. The author in this article analysed the socio-economic conditions of the workers which was far from satisfactory though the railways in this part in a few years had generated huge sum of revenue for the Government. Krishna had focused his attention on the major issues of workers’ discontentment. The most important trade union active in the railway front at that period was AIRF which made strong representation against the policy of forced discharge and on the issue of reinstatement of 93 workers who were already retrenched in 1931.

The author states that the strike action was not a sudden movement. AIRF had circulated notice to the affiliated unions in the month of August. The strike began from 24th

October 1932 in the Perambur mechanical workshops and the workers responded spectacularly, eg. only 300 workers attended the work out of 5700, and the clerks also went on strike from 26th October. About 3000 men out of 4000 struck work at Hubli. The author here pointed out the attitude of the railway administration which was very stubborn and resorted to pressure tactics.

The article “Growth and structure of unions in Southern Railways’ (1980) by D. Narshima Reddy is a valuable article on the origin, growth, and structure of the trade unions in the Southern Railways from the pre-independence era. This article discusses the brief history of the origin of the trade union movement in the three separate railway zones – i.e, (i) South Indian Railway; (ii) Madras and Southern Marhatta Railway; and (iii) Mysore State Railway in South India which now have become the Southern Railways.

The article, “Plight of Railway Constructions Casual labour” by Timir Basu (1981) tries to analyse the conditions of the casual workers especially construction casual labours in the Indian Railways. AIRF organised one conference in Calcutta in November 1980 to focus on the plight of about one lakh workers engaged in various construction jobs of the railways throughout the country. The Railways followed a dual policy in respect of casual workers. The most hazardous of all works is railway construction because these are done in mostly remote places without basic amenities. Casual workers do not even get medical benefits and are not paid injury benefits. For maternity, absent from work for more than 20 days may bring break in service. The author has noticed that the Railways have rejected the demands of casual workers of absorption in the permanent pay-rolls. The casual construction labour now a -days are trying to gather momentum because decasualization was the major demand during the railway general strike of 1960, 1968 and 1974. Basu in this article opined that so long as the regular permanent railway workers remain passive towards the just demands of casual employees the railway authority will continue the practice.

The article “Working class Protest in 19th Century India -Example of Railway Workers” published in EPW Vol-20, No. 4 on 26th January 1985 by Ian J. Kerr provides valuable information about the history of labour protest in the Indian Railways. This article describes about the several categories of railway workers and the different protest movements launched by them. To him in almost all the cases the protest was caused due to

the non- payment of wage. At the end of the article Kerr had revealed the fact that railway workers had shown their capacity to treat the colonial ruler and had become conscious enough to protect their interests against colonial exploitation which led to the development of trade unionism in the country at the latter part of the 19th Century.

All these studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of the strike of 1974. But these are scholarly works. Thus one notes that they do not analyse the nature and impact of the strike in detail. Many of the studies did not raise questions like what were the real reasons behind the strike. Did the workers truly represented the workers? Or it represented the interests of the trade union leaders in particular. Questions like was the strike a conscious effort of the toiling mass of the major part of Indian working class? Moreover several other points were not clearly dealt with by these studies. The editorials were unable to highlight the major problem areas of the strike, eg. the reasons behind the unwillingness of the leftists to support the strike and why they did they use every possible means to turn down the struggle and to break up the psychological strength of the workers and tried to demoralise them? The editorials of the newspapers also did not review the causes of the Government's heavy repression on the railway workers? These studies also did not answer the question did the Railway Board acted in accordance with the dictates of the Union Government or did it enjoy some kind of autonomy? All these points were not examined by the articles and books. Still in the absence of academic works these studies provide valuable information on the strike.

Objective of the Study

Considering the limitations of the studies done on the subject we have spelt out the objectives of the study as to find out the reasons behind the strike of the Railway men in 1974 and certain other related questions. We intend to find out the grievances of the Railway men particularly in the two zones Eastern Railways and in the N.F Railways which led to the extreme decision to go for an indefinite general strike. The study also looks at the impact of the strike particularly in these two zones. We try to find out whether all the shades of opinion in the railway trade unions and the category unions had participated in the strike or not. It looks at the preparations of the trade unions for launching such an indefinite general

strike throughout the country. It attempts to explain the nature of the 1974 railway strike. It looks at the situation that prevailed in the Eastern Railways and NF Railways during the strike days of May 1974. The present study also intends to measure the velocity of the strike action led by the Indian Railway men especially in these two zones. Another objective of this study is to demonstrate and analyse the reaction of the union government towards the movement or how the State had responded to the Railway men's demands and the strike which they have resorted to. It looks at the consequences of the Railway general strike in Eastern and N.F Railways. The study also intends to analyse the political and economic impact of the general strike by the railway workers in 1974.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

For the purpose of conducting a valid piece of research we require data. Research methodology means developing concepts and justifying the technical aspects of any study. It aims at constructing ideas and views regarding the subjects and the issue which are examined as a matter of social research. The purpose of any social research is to build an objective and empirical perspective of the study. The weakness and strength of any research are related with the ability to trace the research problems. Research method keeps the link between technique of discussion and reaching in its conclusion. Research method is an instrument of exploring and analysing the problems.

For answering the research questions, we need to rely on the collected data. This study required both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data are of different types. This study required oral information or oral history that we considered as the most significant resource for this research. It helped us to assess and clarify the demands, aspirations, opinions and the conditions of the railway workers who were directly and indirectly involved with the strike action of May 1974. Interacting with the people corroborates the documentary evidences and helps us know the practical incidents that were experienced by the railway workers. To constitute an argument regarding the trade unions and working class movement in independent India, we need to know our views with the Union leaders and the members who were active when this struggle took place in 1974. Therefore, the railway workers who were participants in the strike were needed to be

interacted. The opinions of the permanent and casual workers and union leaders of the N.F Railways and Eastern Railways are supposed to be the most valuable resource.

To constitute any fundamental argument regarding the chronicle on the workers' resistances and trade union movement in Indian industries particularly in the Indian Railways after independence upto 1975, the views and opinions of the railway men must be examined and analysed. For this purpose we had to conduct interviews. Interview on specific topics attributes a valuable resultant data which formulates dynamism. For this research Semi-structured and Focused or unstructured interview methods were used to collect oral history. In this method the questions are specified to reach a standardisation which seeks both clarification and elaboration. Interviewees were free here to give the answers it was an open ended method. When that respondents could share the references without challenging their preconceptions. The informal method also enabled us to get the reflections on the pattern of the events and incidents that occurred long back. The behaviour and attitude of the interviewees reveal their contributions to their events concerned. Extensive discussion was carried on with the people who were interviewed.

We conducted our interviews in the Railway Headquarters and Trade Union offices in New Delhi; Pandu, Guwahati; Barasat, Kolkata; Alipurduar, Coach Bihar and Siliguri. In few cases interviews were taken at the residences of the union leaders in Kolkata, Kanchrapara, Siliguri, Alipurduar and Coach Bihar also. In these cases the study relied on the qualitative interview method which explored a broad view point on the subjects and the strike event during the 20 days of the struggle. But the knowledge gathered from this method must be guided by the rules of objectivity and comparative analysis of the documents.

Another type of primary data which is an important source for this study are documentary sources. Use of documents in social research is significant for discovering existing questions and then comparing it with the historical evidences. These documents must ensure the progress of the study and utilise the idea for building the relationship between the events and the investigation. These documents are helpful to observe the surroundings and find out the conflict of opinion and ambiguity of the information. Documents may be of various kinds. Usually by documents we understand printed words or

written texts. Resources include government file, administrative reports, reports of governmental committees, peoples' accounts, reports of the public accounts, trade union publications, union records and pamphlets and other daily reports etc. These documents represent the accurate description of what had actually happened during the time of the incident. In order to understand the pattern and meaning of the text, the nature of the documents must be well analysed and compared with other resources.

For addressing the research questions we concentrated on the documents. This research depends on the sources like government's records, administrative reports, governmental publications etc. It also requires trade union publications, the writings of the union leaders etc. In order to answer the research questions this study required information from different government sources, for example, reports of different ministries such as Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Home. Government documents are very helpful in explaining the attitude of the authority and the administration towards the railway workers struggle the working class movement.

These governmental documents were collected from National Archives, New Delhi and National Library Kolkata, the Headquarters of Northern Railways - Baroda House, New Delhi and N.F Railways - Maligaon, Guwahati. For union sources the data were gathered from different trade union office mainly the Head Offices of the NFIR and AIRF situated in State Entry Road, New Delhi. Apart from this, we visited the offices of the Mazdoor Union in different places like, Barasat Kolkata, Pandu Guwahati, Siliguri and the office of AILRSA in Alipurduar. The Pensioners' Associations of Siliguri Junction Branch, NJP Branch, Coachbehar Branch under NF Railways and Kanchrapara Branch, Barasat Branch, Sealdah Branch under Eastern Railways had also been visited. The unions, participated in this strike had a number of publications, writings of trade union leaders, pamphlets and daily reports regarding the strike developments that had taken place in Eastern Railways and Northeast Frontier Railways.

This study is heavily depended on the documents that provide information related to Government and trade union activities. From the National Archives, New Delhi and National Library, Kolkata we collected different directives of the Various Ministers, In-Charge of Ministries to the State Governments and Head of the Police and armed forces.

This study required the reports of different Ministries of the Government of India, regarding the strike situations and their plan of actions to handle the railway workers, published during the strike days. These documents were collected from National Archives and few from GSM Library of Northern Railways Head Quarters, Baroda House, New Delhi and N.F Railways Head Quarters, Maligaon. From the trade union offices especially the AIRF Central Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi we found several important documents relating to the May Strike of 1974. It included the AIRF Weekly Journal on Railwaymen, their proceedings, reports on strike preparations, situations and the consequences of this strike in various railway zones, publications of trade union leaders like George Fernandes, B. T Ranadive, Priya Gupta, Nrisingha Chakroborty etc. From Kolkata Eastern Railway Pensioners' Association we got the books written by Sankar Prosad Chatterjee, S.K Brahma etc. From Pandu trade union office we found the book written by Samar Sengupta which discussed the experiences of the author on different strike struggle's specially the strike of May 1974. The AILRSA Office of Alipurduar provided the special issue of the Journal "Railway Worker" which focused on May 1974 strike. From Siliguri Junction Branch the book by Sri. Nabojyoti Choudhury was collected.

Apart from Primary data, this study required Secondary Data too. Secondary data was needed for understanding the developments and impact of the struggle of 1974 in the Eastern and N.F. Railways. Books on strike by the railwaymen are very scanty. Although sources were limited, few books and articles were available on the railwaymen's struggle of 1974 such as, the articles of Biren Roy, Nabojyoti Chowdhury etc. And few articles written by Ranabir Samaddar, Krishna Ananth, Gopalakrishna etc. are really helpful in understanding the relevance of the strike. Stephen Sherlock's two works, one book and an article remains the most important of all the works. Books and journals are available in the field of labour movement in general in India but not many researchers and historian's shade any light on the trade union movement in the railway industry. Few articles in journals and magazines exist. Magazines provide valuable information in this field of study. Newspapers reports and periodicals during the period from August 1973 to June 1974 were another significant source of secondary data. These data such as books, journals, newspaper reports were collected from National Library, Kolkata, Jawaharlal Nehru University library, New

Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Library of University North Bengal.

The Chapters

The study has been divided into six main chapters excluding the introduction and the conclusion which are also chapters. The first chapter proper describes the industrialisation process in India and the emergence of industrial working class in the colonial period since independence till 1974. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section has discussed the establishment and growth of railway industry and the emergence of industrial workers in colonial India. The Second section of the chapter describes the process of industrialisation specifically the process of the development of railway industry since independence till 1974. The third section of the study attempts to look at the process of development and consolidation of the railway workers as an industrial working class. This chapter provides a brief history of the railway workers' oppression in the colonial period.

Chapter two explains the emergence and nature of workers' resistances in the Indian Railways since its inception up to 1974. This chapter enquires the reasons behind the workers' grievances and their discontentment in the railway industry till 1974. It is divided into two sections. The first section analyses the growth of labour unrests in Indian Railways in the colonial era till independence. The second section of this chapter observed the nature and development of trade union movement in the Indian Railways from 1947 to 1974. This section has also attempted to find out the reasons of workers' resentments which compelled them to form category wise unions based on craft sentiments. This chapter looks at the causes of workers' resistances in the railway industry since the beginning of the industry up to 1973.

The third chapter is divided into two sections. The first section has focussed its attention on the grievances of the railway workers which forced them to revolt against their authority. It also discusses how the railwaymen had prepared themselves to launch an indefinite and general strike throughout the country. The second section has tried to observe the situation that persisted in the different zones of the railways all over the country during

the strike days in May 1974. Chapter three tries to give the answer to the question i.e., ‘the reasons behind the grievances of the railwaymen’ raised by this study, the grievances that compelled them to go for an indefinite strike.

The fourth chapter deals with the May 1974 strike in Eastern Railways. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section attempts to discuss the discontentment and grievances of the workers in the Eastern Railways. It also intends to elucidate the process of the preparations of the various trade unions in the E.R for launching a general and indefinite strike throughout the country. The second section has dealt with the situation during the twenty days of strike in this zone. In the third section we analyse the impact of this struggle on the economic, political and social spheres of the country. Chapter four addresses the answer to the questions of strike preparations in E.R by the railwaymen and it gives an account of the situation that prevailed during the strike days and also the impact of the movement in this zone.

The fifth chapter focuses on the Railway Workers’ Strike of May 1974 in the Northeastern Frontier Railways (N.F Railways). It is divided into three sections. The first section has discussed the grievances of the railwaymen in N.F Railways. It also tries to describe the preparation of the railway workers of this zone before the strike began and how the workers of N.F Railways along with the other zones had prepared themselves for the general strike. The second section of this study intended to discuss the strike situation throughout the N.F. Railways during the long twenty days of the strike. The third section we mainly dealt with the impact of the strike in the N.F. Railways. In this section we analyse the consequences and effects of these long days of workers’ movement in the entire N.F. Railways. Chapter five attempts to give answers to the questions regarding the preparations and situations of the railwaymen’s struggle in N. F Railways. It also answers the question of impact of the strike in this Zone.

Chapter six deals with the responses and reactions of the Railway Board in particular and the Indian State in general towards the strike of May 1974. This chapter has two sections. The first section examines the reasons behind the attitude of the Railway Board towards the railway workers’ resistances in this industry and other industrial sectors since independence till 1974. The second section of this study is an attempt to unfold the

responses and reactions of the government as well as the Railway Board towards the railwaymen's struggle in May 1974. It also has tried to find out the causes behind the anti labour attitude of the government of India. The question 'what was the attitude of the State towards the railwaymen's strike?' raised by this study has been answered in this chapter. After having done all that we have attempted a summary and conclusion at the end of the study.