



POST INDEPENDENCE WEST BENGAL STATE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES MOVEMENT (1947-1957)

Chiranjib Konar

Assistant Professor Department of History,
Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya, Haripal, Hooghly.



ABSTRACT :

The State Government Employees are the unic part of administration since the establishment of colonial rule in India but they face many trouble from their European bosses. After independence the condition remain unchanged. Meanwhile in early 1920 government employees organized themselves and formed some employees association for demanding their rights. Such as Indian telegraph association (1906), All Bengal Ministerial officers Association (1920), High Court Association (1923), Bengal Secretariat Association etc. But in early 1930's there was economic depression and then outbreak of Second World War as a result the condition of state Government employees become critical. The scenario was didn't changed even after the independence In this situation the 'Opty' employees (Hindu employees who gave their option to work under W.B, government) face critical problem. As a result they organize themselves in militant action against the government. Government also took strongaction against them and dismissed many employees. But the employees didn't panic, they formed West Bengal State Government employees federation in 1947 for organize better movement. This movement get a huge boost up when state govt. employees formed 'state coordination committee' in 1956 and this was a great land mark in the history of state government employees movement.

KEYWORDS : Establishment, Opty, organize, outbreak.

INTRODUCTION

The State Government Employees are the unic part of administration since the establishment of colonial rule in India but they face many trouble from their European bosses. After independence the condition remain unchanged. But the employees began to think that problems attached with service conditions would be solved and in an independent country the employees would get back their rights and they would have full prestige. In reality their dreams began to break. Due to partition thousands of 'Opty' employees (the Hindu employees who gave their option to work under West Bengal Government), came from East Pakistan to West Bengal. Their posting, housing and economic crisis made the situation critical.

MOBILIZATION OF EMPLOYEES:-

The government attitude towards refugee problem or the problem regarding the livelihood of the State Government employees and other working class people employees created an unrest among the state government employees. Price rise, residential problem and retrenchment made State Government employees panic. In this situation under the initiative of the rationing employees Union and in the presence of famous trade unions leaders and journalists, employees took part in the 'Anti-Retrenchment Convention' and took initiative for joint movement against retrenchment. During this

period 20 unions jointly formed the West Bengal State Government employees Federation 22nd February on 1947¹ and it was apparently non-political.

In protest against the 'security act' declared by the first provincial Congress Ministry of West Bengal in independent India headed by Dr. P.C. Ghosh on 19th December, 1948 thousands of people gathered in front of the assembly. To control the situation police charged tear gas and lathi and firing took place in which Sisir Mondal, a Medical student died.² Many Government employees and general public were wounded and in protest against this Asu Samanta, secretary of Rationing Employees' Union gave his statement in the newspaper. As a result he was dismissed. As a result of this dismissal thousands of employees protested in the town Hall and in the first week of January 1948 the rationing employees is observed pen down Strike. In order of make the Federation of West Bengal State Government employees more powerful the elected representatives of different unions decided to organize a conference on 13th and 14th March, 1948 at the Wellington square. The Politicalization of State Government employees even if in a slow and subdued form started from the time. Meanwhile Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy took over the responsibility as the chief minister of West Bengal. It had declared that if the State Government employees joined the conference. at wellington square they would be dismissed, yet the employees took full preparation for the conference suddenly the joint convenor of the conference Panchanan Mukhopadhyay and four more employees were arrested. As a result of this employee gathered at the ground floor of Writers' Buildings and started agitation. They also ignored section 144 and gave joint deputation to the Chief Minister at the Assembly. Due to the pressure created by the employees the suspension order was withdrawn. The historical conference of State Government Employees was organized on 13th and 14th March 1948 at Wellington square³. At this conference important issues were discussed like permanency of temporary employees, residence for all employees wage for existence etc. Moreover the Federation was made more representative and politically inclined. The then president of BPTUC Shri Mrinal Kanti Bose became the President and Sudhir Acharya became the secretary of the Federation and together with these leaders a strong working committee was formed.

In April 1948 the government declared increase in dearness allowance but at the same time it begin to attack the employees. The unions that joined the conference were show-cased. During 1948 before the Rath Yatra on the pretext of police report Barin Banerjee, an employee of the Writers' Buildings statistical directorate and close of the Federation was dismissed⁴. This incident agitated the employees of Writers' Buildings and deputation was given to the chief minister and he asked the employees to meet him. But next day was Rath Yatra and suddenly a holiday was declared, for the first time on that occasion. Naturally the employees were agitated and they started demonstration. In this situation the employees met the Chief Minister but he did not initially agree to withdraw the dismissal order but finally he went down a bit and Barin Banerjee went back to his old department.

The State Government employees movement gradually gained momentum. In the beginning of 1949 in the Bharat Sabha Hall, Calcutta a conference was held on which certain decisions were taken to organize the movement beside main demands of the employees were made the employees declared that if the demands were not fulfilled they would go on strike Ballot. The main demands in this conference were living wage, permanency of temporary employees, release of imprisoned employees, reappointment of dismissed and suspended employees, full rights of trade unions change in the service conduct rule. Meanwhile on 9th March 1949 all India Railway strike was declared. To make a movement of the railway employees stronger the Federation decided to organize a conference on 8th march, 1949 at the University Institute hall but a pressure of government the authority of the institute Hall withdraw the permission of the conference. Due to this incident the employee started agitation

1. Swadhinata, 23rd February, 1947.

2. Anandabazar Patrika, 20th December 1948.

3. Sangrami Hatiyar Special vol. 1981, p-40

4. Anuradha Kayal: Organization and movement of white collar employees of west Bengal in the post colonial period 1947-77. P 219.

from 9th March, 1949 and the situation in Writers Buildings become tense.⁵ On the very day at the tiffin break the employees gathered in front of the Home Department and started giving slogans and demanded the release of imprisoned employees. The Chief Minister did not meet the trade union leaders and instead the chief minister ordered the break the gathering and also ordered the arrest of trade union leaders. Between 1951 and 1955 one by one new unions of the state government employees were formed and the old unions were reorganized. In 1951 some leftist minded youngmen like Ajoy Mukherjee, Nitai Hari Majumdar, Anil Banerjee entered the Secretariat through the P.S.C. examination and became the first ranking leaders of the secretariat union. Besides, Sudhendu Ghosh, Salil Dutta, Sukumar Das and others started reorganizing writers' Building centric three other organizations. As a result of this in 1953 secretariat employees' association organized its first conference and started work in new vigour. After its rebirth Nalini Das become its President and Sudhir Sengupta became the secretary and Jagannath Roy and Narayan Das Sharma become the assistant secretary of the newly formed Union. In 1953 the West Bengal Directorate Employees Association was organized and Bibhuti Dasgupta become the president and Lochan Mitra the secretary and in 1959 received government recognition. The Writers' Building inferior service Association and Records Suppliers Association was organized in 1952, and Asit Baran Ghosh was the president of both the organization⁶.

Formation of coordination committee

The State Government Employees movement at this period was influenced by the employees of the Food and Distribution department who organized year round movement against retrenchment and received success. Though anti-retrenchment movement become successfully yet different categories of employees faced a number of other problems. The government did not show sympathy towards the demands of the employees. In this situation the employees united together to organize joint movement and in 1956 the West Bengal State Government employees formed the 'state co-ordination committee'. The formation of the coordination committee was a great landmark in the history of the movement of the State Government employees and since then state government employees started working on new route.

The remarkable success of the opposition leftist parties in the Assembly election of 1952 gave a fillip to the agitational Politics. The spectacular development in the trade union movement in the fifties, particularly from the period 1955- 56 is the surging tide of trade union movement of the government and other white collar employees. From 1956 there was an all-round price rise and particularly the price of daily necessities begin to rise by lips and bounds. In this situation the condition of State Government employees like other people depending on Meager monthly salary become miserable and their problems were increasing day by day. In this situation on 9th June, 1956 the leaders of seven unions meet at Writers Building canteen Hall. In this according to the decision taken at the 9th June meeting a memorandum was prepared and on 12th June, 1956 different unions separately gave the copy of the memorandum to the chief minister⁷. The State Government employees demanded that due to the price rise they should be given a special allowance of rupees 25 per month. They also demanded dearness allowance as per Central Government employees. Beside this demands it was demanded that before puja holidays all non-gazetted employees should be given one month salary in advance which should be repaid in ten installment. The step taken by some unions to improve the condition of State Government employees attracted other unions in West Bengal and all unions came for what respective of party to improve the life of non-gazetted employees. All the union met together discussed about their demands and in this way a new phase started in the State Government Employees movement. On 14th August, 1956 on behalf of the employees representatives of unions met the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary S.N. Roy. Finance Secretary B. Dasgupta and Director of the Statistical Bureau Nistaran

5. Ibid p 220.

6. Sangrami Hatiyar Special vol. 2004 p-25.

7. Anuradha Kayal, op. cit, p -222.

Chakraborty were present in the meeting⁸. At the meeting differences cropped upon different issues between employees representatives and the government. On 24th August, 1956 in a government press note price rise was admitted and it was declared that employees with basic salary of Rs. 250 would receive Rs. 2/- as a relief⁹. This agitated the employees According to the joint decisions taken at the call of four unions at the Canteen Hall of Writers' Buildings all the employees met last phase of August, 1956. In this meeting the employees did not accept the proposal of an allowance of Rs. 2 per month and they felt insulted and protested against the government decision. But the Government did not learn from the any lesson from the situation and thought that it was justan economic demand. In the first week of October, 1956 the president of Secretarial Association Panchanan Mukhopadhyay and six other leaders were suspended. The employees were astonished but they were not frightened. The employees jointly decided to all a conference at the Canteen Hall of Writers' Building but the Government did not give them any permission and locked the Canteen Hall.Later the conference was held at the University Institute Hall. At this conference the suspended employees were welcomed and it was decided to take action to said the suspended employees and besides dearness allowance the employees demanded that conduct Rules should be rejected and they should receive trade union rights according to the constitution. This change in the middle class employees' movement was definitely the second phase in the State Government employees met the Chief Minister on 10thOctober, 1956. This so showed that Government could not neglect the United movement of the employees¹⁰. In both the meeting only few recognized unions were called but the representative of the unions discussed on behalf of the entire employees society. Though the employees met the Chief Minister but nothing came out of these meeting. Afterthe two meetings the Chief Minister clarify stated that the Government would not tolerate any road procession or meeting at any open place. At January, 1957 the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru came to Calcutta and at that time the employees gave a memorandum to the Prime Minister. The statesman reported "Presiding at the annual general meeting of the Indian Institute of Public Administration at the Sapru House on Saturday. Nehru said, the Government service rules need to be received as they have become outdated.....It would have to be changed."¹¹after that the suspension order was withdrawn against the employees. In this situationthe Chief Minister called the President and Secretary of the Secretarial Association at this residence and asked them give a regret letter declaring their wrong deeds if they wanted the withdrawal of their suspension order. This act of the Chief Minister proved the lenient attitude which was regarded as the weakness of the Government. Inthis situation, the employees unions declared the week between 11th and 16th February, 1957 as the Demand week' to press for their five demands. On 16th February, 1957¹² at the Wellington Square there was a great weathering and part of the unorganized employees came and stood beside the organized employees. The main five demands were-withdrawal of suspension order, all non-gazetted employees should get a dearness allowance ofRs. 25 monthly, permanency of temporary employees, change in the pay-scale and trade union rights according to the constitution.

After the general election of 1957 it was declared that the dearness allowance of Rs. 2/- would be increased Rs. 5/- but at the same time of President of Secretariat Association Panchanan Mukhopadhyay and the General Secretary of Writers' Building Lower Grade Government Employees Association were dismissed and it was also declared that Jiten Das Sharma of Ministerial Officers'Association would be punished. On 8th June, 1957 the presidentship of Panchanan Mukhopadhyay a joint meeting was called and in the meeting the Government was threatened that if the dismissal against of the employees were not withdrawn there would be agitational movement

8. Jugantar, 15th Agust, 1956.

9. The Statesman 25th Agust, 1956.

10. Sangrami Hatiyar Special vol. 2004 p- 30

11. The Statesman, 25th January, 1957.

12. Anandabazar Patrika, 17th February, 1957.

he was recognized as the representative of the employees and a letter was addressed to him for a joint meeting and the Chief Minister agreed to meet the representative of Secretariat Association. The inside and outside the Assembly¹³. In the Assembly the Congress Government was attacked by the opposition of this issue. In this situation one of the dismissed employees was given an official status and members of the Secretariat Association met and discussed with the Chief Minister on 18th June, 1957¹⁴. The Chief Minister for the first time admitted that the Conduct Rule of 1949 and the Service Condition' of the employees were miserable and were not according to the constitution and after discussion with the representative of the employees the contact rules would be changed. The Chief Minister also agreed to discuss with the employees about their different demands and for that reason he asked for a note. The entire matter was discussed at the joint meeting of the unions and they decided to change their war strategy. As a result of this three unions gave a regret letter to the Chief Minister on 20th June, 1957 for the 'technical valuation' of the 'conduct rules' and the letters referred to the promise of the Chief Minister to solve the economic and service centric demands of the employees. On the basis of this dismissal and other punishment order were withdrawn. In the assembly the chief minister declared that after the budget season he would discuss with the representatives of the employees about the changes in 'conduct rules' and regarding the different demands of the employees.

A new phase in the employees movement started from July 1957. On 20th and 21st July, 1957¹⁵ for the first time the representatives of different unions together with district representatives organized a state based joint convention. In this convention a memorandum was prepared in which list of demands were placed. Moreover the proposed changes in the conduct Rules and the Circular of 1949 and other rules and regulations were incorporated in the memorandum and it was placed in front of the Chief Minister. From November 1957 the employees were attacked by a new strategy and on the pretext of police report the employees were dismissed without any reason and this took a larger form in 1958. But the employees didn't Panic they continue their protest and agitation against the government under the leadership of coordination committee.

CONCLUSION:-

The State Government Employees movement of above period maintained principles that the employees depending on the situation that would organize their movement and seeking public support behind the employees was given greatest importance to the movements. Another important thing of this movement was the leftist attitude of the employees. It is remember that the consciousness of leftist thinking had grown up among the employees in our state after post independence period, for their miserable condition opposition party take full advantage of this situation and sympathetic towards the movement under the leadership of Jyoti Basu and slowly the state government employees movement became more and more powerful under the influence of the left.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Anandabazar Patrika
2. Jugantar
3. Swadhinata
4. The Statesman
5. Sangrami Hatiyar (Journal)
6. Anuradha Kayal: Organization and Movement of White Collar Employees of West Bengal in the Post Colonial Period 1947-77.

13. Sangrami Hatiyar Special vol. 1981 p- 50

14. Anandabazar Patrika, 20th June, 1957.

15. Jugantar, 23rd July, 1957.



Chiranjib Konar

Assistant Professor Department of History , Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya, Haripal, Hooghly.

LBP PUBLICATION