

14 Short transcriptive note on J. Narayan Rao

I was born on June 2, 1936. After retirement I organised the pensioners. Presently I am working as General Secretary of the Pensioners' Association.

I come from a very poor background. My father was fourth grade employee. I wanted to become a teacher and was keen to go for advance studies. Instead I joined the Railways after graduation to earn my wages and look after our family.

I joined South Eastern Railways at Nainpur in Mandla district in Madhya Pradesh in July, 1958. From the very beginning, I had the feeling that only Red Flag union could deliver the goods for the workers. After joining the service, I approached the leaders. Com BJ Rajalu took me to the union office and soon after I started working in the trade union organisation.

In Nagpur, I visited the Communist party office and met Com AB Bardhan who inspired me greatly. It was under his influence that later I joined the Communist Party.

The first agitation in my life was 1960 strike of all government employees. VJ Rajulu was arrested in Nainpur alongwith others who were sympathisers of Communist party. No less than 90 percent had joined the movement but next day itself everybody joined the duties due to a misunderstanding. A rumour was spread that I was not on strike while the fact was that even when everybody else had joined back, I was still outside alongwith another comrade. The demands in the strike were implementation and modification of second pay commission. After it was called off unconditionally, all the striking workers were taken back without any victimization.

After 1963, I was transferred to Nagpur. In five years that were spent in union activities, I got my political education. I was placed in South Eastern Railway branch where I came in touch with Com Mushtaq and PB Kotaiyya. They used to discuss various issues with me. Com Mushtaq used to bring political literature for me. Finally in 1963, I joined the party in Nagpur. Before that I did not have any political exposure as our family was apolitical.

In South Eastern Railways, JM Biswas was the trade union leader. He was against communists and instructed all the branches not to allow communists inside. They were deprived of even its membership and were not allowed to contest elections. The Communist party decided to have its own organisation that spread over to loco sheds, clerical staff and soon 90 percent of the workers joined it.

I was always moving with the workers and never used to sit in the office. I used to walk on the railway tracks to meet the gangmen. The most illiterate and poor, these gangmen were even manhandled by the PWD staff. I used to travel 50-60 miles a day on cycle and later when I had a scooter the area covered was even greater. In this period I was able to develop a team with outstanding workers like Luxmi Narayan, Kubhiram and others, extremely dedicated. Thus a strong union emerged. No injustice against the workers was tolerated. Always we were prepared for militant actions.

Many localised strike had taken place between 1968 and '72. When our leader Roychoudhary was arrested, cat call strike was there. Two workers, Chaitram and Baliram were shot dead when they wanted to meet the General Manager travelling in a special train in MP. Strike followed soon after.

When the Railways introduced a new system changing the gangs, all the workers came out against the move and strike was organised by the gangmen which continued for five days. The administration had to give in to the workers' demand. Another step was taken to increase the work load of the gangmen who used to look after eight sleepers till then and by the new move, they were to take care of 12 sleepers. There was widespread agitation against the move and trains were disrupted.

The union was struggling for the lowest paid workers and it was only the South Eastern railway workers who took such initiatives. On the question of issuing 12 kg rice to the workers was raised and the government showed helplessness, another strike was launched in December, 1973. I got arrested and was in jail for five days.

In 1974, strike was started on second May itself instead of the call on May 5 as we agitating for our local demands as well. I was arrested alongwith others and 13 ladies were also among them. They had picketed at the gates. All of us were released after 40 days in jail. Com SK Sanyal alongwith leaders of coal industries and prominent lawyers organised Railwaymen's Sympathisers' Association to help us.

DATE: Sept 2002
Time: Afternoon's
Venue: Nagpur, MLA Hostel
Interviewers: Anil Rajimwale & Krishna Jha

Context: He was very amiable and committed person.

14. Short Biographical note on J. Narayan Rao

Narayan Rao, born on June 2, 1936, and presently General Secretary of Pensioners' Association, joined South Eastern Railways at Nainpur in Mandla district in Madhya Pradesh in July, 1958. From the very beginning, he was keen to join Red Flag Union. Com BJ Rajalu took him to the union office and soon after he started working in the trade union organisation.

After he came to Nagpur, he visited the Communist party office and met Com AB Bardhan. It was under his influence that he joined the Communist Party.

The first agitation in his life was 1960 strike of all government employees. VJ Rajulu was arrested in Nainpur alongwith others who were sympathisers of Communist party. No less than 90 percent had joined the movement but next day itself everybody had joined except Narayan Rao and another comrade. The demands in the strike were implementation and modification of second pay commission. After it was called off unconditionally, all the striking workers were taken back without any victimization.

After 1963, he was transferred to Nagpur. In five years that were spent in union activities, he got his political education. He was placed in South Eastern Railway branch where he came in touch with Com Mushtaq and PB Kotaiyya who used to discuss various issues with him. Com Mushtaq used to bring political literature for him. In 1963, he joined the party in Nagpur. Before that he did not have any political exposure as his family was apolitical.

They were very poor and his father was fourth grade employee. Narayan Rao joined Railways after graduation though he wanted to pursue his studies and become a teacher. He used to take part in sports too.

In South Eastern Railways, JM Biswas was the trade union leader. He was against communists and instructed all the branches not to allow communists inside. They were deprived of even its membership and were not allowed to contest elections. The party decided to have its own organisation that spread over to loco sheds, clerical staff and soon 90 percent of the workers joined it.

Narayan Rao never used to sit in the office instead he was always mobile. He used to walk on the railway tracks to meet the gangmen. The most illiterate and poor, these gangmen were even manhandled by the PWD staff. He used to travel 50-60 miles a day on cycle and later on a two-wheeler and developed a team with outstanding workers like Luxmi Narayan, Kubhiram and others, extremely dedicated. Thus a strong union emerged. Any injustice against workers was never tolerated and militant actions were taken.

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The union was struggling for the lowest paid workers and it was only the South Eastern railway workers that was taking such steps. On the issue of ration of 12 kg of rice to the workers was raised and the government

showed helplessness, another strike was launched in December, 1973. Narayan Rao was arrested and was in jail for five days.

In 1974, strike was started on second May itself instead of the call on May 5. Narayan Rao was arrested alongwith others and 13 ladies were also among them as they picketed at the gates. They were all released after 40 days in jail. Com SK Sanyal alongwith leaders of coal industries and prominent lawyers organised Railwaymen's Sympathisers' Association.