The Working Class - Is it just another phrase in English language or is there anything more to it? Is it worthy enough to be a subject for historical research or is it the 'Subject in history'? These are the questions that concern the profession of historical research and constitute a major part of debate, discussions, workshops - all conducted in thin air. On the other hand, those, who have become the subject of these exercises affirm their specific role through protests and struggles at various moments in history. The affirmation of their own role is an aspect of their protest against the exploitation of their employers and against the repressive machinery of the state. The memory of the labour movement is filled with the recollection of strikes that were sometimes national in scope and in most cases of local concern and completely forgotten elsewhere, although they left a deep mark on the region where they occurred.

My interest and efforts in carrying out research on the working classes stem not only from my subjective sympathies towards the Working Class, but also from my conviction that every experience of the working class belong to the collective experience of the Indian Working Class. And more important, the working class struggle present
(ii)

challenging questions that must be revised on the level where they actually arise - that of political effectiveness and not of scholarship alone. This is the basic purpose of my research design.

Indeed, it was my father who 'initiated' me to think in these lines. The historic general strike all over the country by the Railwaymen in May 1974 was the occasion when in the most unconscious but nevertheless spirited manner, I had repeated the slogan for bonus - unconscious because I thought that my father and his comrades were demanding supply of a few detergent cakes with trade name 'bonus'! Spirited because it was my conviction that what they demanded was their right and they should have it. It happened to me at the age of 10.

The journey towards complimenting this conviction or rather, this 'faith' in the rightness of the demand with an organic understanding of the same, in other words my first lessons in Marxism began at home. Father was never tired of explaining and convincing me on the correctness of Marxism. Not once did he become impatient and give up his responsibility as a Communist. Even a few days back, many crude remarks made by me due to the many streams of anarchic and adventurist thoughts influencing me for long were taken by him in its spirit - he reprimanded me as a father but hastened to influence me as a Communist.
While father initiated my conviction to Marxism, it was mother who is responsible for my involvement in the student and youth movements from my early days in college. She was unflinching in her conviction that what father does was correct. She was instrumental in moulding me into an activist - by seeing to it that I get up early in the morning and get ready on days when I had a meeting to attend or a strike or procession to organise in one of the schools or colleges. She never hesitated to stay awake and serve my dinner on those days when I reached home late night. Well, she was herself a participant in many such movements!

Mother and Father vied with each other in ensuring that I am not deprived of any opportunity to study. They ensured that money was never a constraint in as far as my requirements to pursue my studies are concerned. But for their determination, and efforts, a smooth uninterrupted educational career up to this stage would not have been possible. My only sister was an active participant in this whole process.

This atmosphere at home was conducive to build in me a determination to take up this subject for research. However, there were other factors which had their influences in building up this desire to study the role of the Working Class in making the history of our country.
The enthusiasm of my Supervisor, Prof. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in promoting this desire of mine is the most important of all factors that enabled me to take up such a topic. He had his reservations on very few statements of mine, but his expressions were never against the research design and its basic purpose. I can never forget his reminders on various occasions to discharge my political responsibilities as well as to take care of my studies.

Among the many friends whose companionship I enjoyed through this work Saumyajit, Nadarajah, Nadeem, and Fatty are the ones whom I can never forget. In my days of frustration, it was Comrade Keyvan, a Communist who had sought refuge from the gallows of Ayatolah Khomeini, who succeeded in instilling the confidence in me that Marxism is scientific and it shall never fail.

Let me express that Santha contributed a lot in ensuring the completion of this thesis by putting up with a lot of problem in the process. Mr Sharma as well as Tiwari were extremely nice to me whenever I went to them for my typing work. But for their cooperation I might not have been able to complete this thesis so soon.

Last but not the least, let me make a note of clarification on my subjective sympathies to the cause of the
working class - that this does not mean in any sense to relegate the mistakes committed by them and their leadership and romanticise the story. On the other hand, the effort is to construct the history of the working class to learn from the experiences in order to go ahead in fulfilling a historical necessity.

The urge to do this is more important today when the social fabric, the base on which the edifice of a revolutionary struggle is to be built up by the working class is being threatened by forces of reaction in the country. Let me end by quoting Lissagaray, a survivor and historian of the Paris Commune;

whosoever invents false revolutionary legends for the people, amuses them with lyrical tales, is no less guilty than a geographer who draws up misleading maps for navigators.

(V. Krishna Ananth)