

CHAPTER FOUR

WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN SATARA DISTRICT FROM 1947 to 1960

The post-Independence period of the Indian Labour Movement is characterised by certain tendencies and shifts, both in the ideological and organisational fields, which distinguish it from the previous period. The Indian Labour Movement in the previous period was ideologically nationalistic. For a time, under the influence of the Communists in the late twenties the movement had tried to be independent of the nationalist movement. But before long, there was a reaction, and the same old relation between the All India Trade Union Congress and the Indian National Congress was re-established. That is why, in that stage of the movement the trade unions' goals were always regarded subsidiary to the main political current of the times that is, India's struggle for independence from foreign power. One of the most important methods in the armoury of Indian trade unions in those days, due to the political history of the country, was militancy and a tendency of mass-conflagration. Under the circumstances Indian trade unions essentially as instruments of collective bargaining, were too weak. No doubt, permanent trade unions had arisen in the second stage of the movement, but they were characterised by lack of continuous growth and development. Lastly, trade unionism was, more or less, limited to industrial workers, and there hardly existed unions in the primary and tertiary sectors of the economy.

The post-independence period has witnessed brisk and record-breaking activities in the field of trade unionism,

Economic causes and support from popular ministries helped workers to organise and put their claims collectively. The employers have also been gradually realising the importance and need of trade unions and the more progressive amongst them have even helped the growth of trade unionism on proper lines. Yet it appears that trade unionism has only touched the fringe of the labour class in this country and only a fraction of those workers who can be organised along trade union lines have been so organized. The organizational base has widened, and today there are found strong unions even amongst the non-industrial middle-class employees.

Though the number of trade unions has increased after independence, the average membership of the state unions has been continually declining. This shows that in the states small sized unions are being organised. In apparent contrast to state trade unions the average membership of central trade unions has been continually increasing. This shows that there is a tendency for the inter-provincial unions to gain further strength. This is a healthy tendency. But the fall in average membership indicates the preponderance of small unions. This is a great weakness of the Indian trade union movement. These smaller unions cannot carry on effective collective bargaining negotiations and cannot ensure its effective implementation and observation. Small sized unions cannot even maintain discipline amongst their own members and cannot provide any friendly benefit schemes. To think of such unions maintaining a whole time paid staff or have research sections is living in a fool's paradise. Workers can meet these

powerful organised employers and can influence the government and the course of labour legislation only if they have strong trade unions of their own. This becomes all the more necessary in the case of inter-provincial industries, especially where the staff is transferable from one province to another.¹ The tendency of rising prices and the cost of living continued unabated in the post-war period also and a wave of inflation, speculation, black marketing was let loose. The workers suffered the most. Wages also increased but prices rose faster, always leaving a gap between monetary wages and cost of living. Workers' real wages has declined. This worsening economic situation was helpful in the creation of class consciousness amongst workers. They began to realise that their interests and the interests of employers were conflicting. They also realised that concerted and group action alone can get them their legitimate due. This class consciousness and willingness for joint and group action in the face of economic hardship was the most powerful force for increased trade union activity in the post-war period. Periods of intense political activities have their favourable reaction on trade union movement.

Greater freedom for trade union workers and reduced fear of victimisation was another factor which increased trade union activities after independence. Various legislations were passed which conferred greater rights and privileges on trade unions. Victimisation cannot be easily done. Employers have to follow the

given procedure before dismissing or even suspending their employees. Trade union workers could work with greater freedom. The changed attitude of the government was another helpful factor. Popular governments both at the centre and the states did not believe in suppressing labour movement.

The government's industrial relations policy is responsible for an increase in the number of registered trade unions. Under various legislations the government has set up an elaborate machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes. The machinery provides for joint consultation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration. Benefits from this government's industrial relations machinery are not available to unregistered trade unions. Registration also conferred certain special advantages upon trade unions. Thus, the trade Union Amendment Act of 1947 provided that registered unions can claim recognition from employers if they satisfy certain conditions. Registered trade unions have been given a right to represent workers before various tribunals and adjudication boards and arbitrators. This was an added inducement for trade unions to get themselves registered.

The trade unions which came into existence during the earlier period became part of the industrial and political structure. Certain problems had cropped up during the war, important among which were of Dearness Allowance and Bonus. After hard negotiations a show of strength, workers of Bombay got their right to D.A. established. Since D.A. was intended to neutralise the loss

sustained by the workers due to increase in prices, it was linked up with cost of living index number. To get the right to bonus as a deferred payment recognised, the workers had to give a tough fight. In 1949, they were on strike for 65 days. That sparked off a wave of strikes in other industrial centres.²

Another major development in this period was the desire of various political parties to increase their influence among the working classes which was clearly noticeable. Every political party wanted to get a foothold in the labour movement. Since All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was captured by the Communists, the Congress party desired to have a separate labour organisation. The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was established in May 1947. Because of its affinity with the ruling party, the INTUC became the biggest organisation in Maharashtra. In the initial period, Congress Ministries helped it by intervening effectively in the disputes to which INTUC was a party. Under the B.I.R. Act provision has been made to accord recognition to a union, which commands the largest number of membership, as a representative union. This entails privileges like functioning as the sole bargaining agent of the workers etc. In many places and fields, unions affiliated to the INTUC had been recognised as representative unions creating thereby hindrances in the path of unions run by other parties.³

On quitting the Congress, the Socialists formed their own central labour organisation by the name of Hind Mazdoor Panchayat.

Later it merged with the Indian Federation of Trade Unions to form the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. Consequent to the split of the Praja Socialist Party in 1953, Hind Mazdoor Panchayat was again revived by the splinter group. It became a formidable force in Bombay during the sixties.

While veteran trade union leaders were engaged in this summit game, the workers of smaller industrial centres found it difficult to run their unions. Nagpur and Solapur witnessed decline in trade union activities mainly because of the sick textile mills which closed down in rapid succession. Working class had increased in numbers at various district and taluka places, but due to paucity of trained workers and generally dampening political climate, the unions there are not very strong. Due to the absence or weakness of trade unions, the workers at these places hardly get due protection of the labour laws. For example, minimum wage for bidi workers is fixed at Rs. 3.50 per 1,000 bidis, but many workers get less than Rs. 2/- at places like Sholapur, Barshi etc.

During this period, there have been certain innovations in the trade union movement. Roadworkers employed by the Buildings and Communications Department of the Government, Kotwals of villages and electricity workers have been organised on the State level by the Lal Nishan Party while S.T. employees have been organised by the Congressmen under INTUC auspices and by the Socialists and Communists jointly under the S.T. Mazdoor Sabha

banner. Unprotected workers like hotel-employees, hawkers, hamals and gadiwalas have been organised by the Socialists in Bombay, Pune and in a few district places. These are welcome efforts but there are vast areas still uncovered by trade union activity.

Since political parties have taken initiative in organising trade unions, the latter helped the former. Organisational set-up of the unions is made available to the parties. They also get some recruits for their cadres.

Satara District

Even before independence the workers in the big industrial local centres like Kirloskarwadi, Ogalewadi, Satara Road and Sakharwadi were organised. But after independence the workers in small industrial units and other services like Municipal workers, Kotwals, Buildings and Communications Department's workers, bank employees, S.T. employees started organising. Some of the organisations were the branches of State organisation. But in general the awakening of class consciousness had started taking shape.

After independence in 1948 the trouble started in Kirloskarwadi first. Workers demanded individual scale-grade and wage increase from the day of demand. Union gave the notice of strike to the company. The Congress leaders like Ramanand Bharati, Buwasaheb Gosavi and Bhai Chhannusing Chandele from Solapur worked as intermediary. Company tried to compromise but it was of no

effect. The workers were now conscious of their problems. Shankarrao Kirloskar wrote a letter to the Chief Minister Balasaheb Kher stating that it was impossible for him to run the factory in such troubled circumstances. Therefore he had to keep the factory closed.⁴

Company's decision and union's notice for strike resulted in closing of the factory. But Ramanand Bharati made compromise and workers started their work. The important condition in the compromise was that there would be no victimisation. But after the starting of the work the Company complained to Aundh Government that the strike was illegal, so government should declare the strike illegal. The case was admitted in the labour court of Shri Petkar. Proceedings started in the Company's guest house. From the Company's side Advocate Dhavale and from Union's side Advocate V.N. Patil worked in the case. The witnesses were Chhannusing Chandele, Ramand Bharati and some workers. Court gave its judgement that Shankarrao Kirloskar himself wrote the letter to Kher and decided to keep factory closed. Accordingly, workers stopped the work. So, it was not a strike at all. The court even advised the company to withdraw the case but the company did not agree. They kept proceedings going. In result the union gave the proof of Court's judgement and claimed the compensation for the days lost in strike.⁵

Gandhi's assassination by Godse affected the labour movement in Maharashtra. Until 1947, the Communist workers were active in

trade union movement in which most of them were Brahmins. After Gandhiji's murder they were automatically gone out of the movement because of the unfavourable atmosphere. Their place was taken by the leaders from national movement, who were non-Brahmins. Even where the communists were still active, like Satara Road, the leadership was changed from the hands of Brahmins to non-Brahmins. Naturally, in Satara Road union though the Union was under communist influence, the place of Chitale and Dandekar was taken by the leaders like Tushar Pawar.

Another important change after independence was the merger of states in Indian Union. The rulers like Pant Pratidinidhi of Aundh gladly agreed to merge their state while the ruler of Phaltan, Naik Nimbalkar, was not very much willing but the workers and their Union at Sakharwadi, compelled him to merge his state in Indian territory. With this change the industrialists lost their support and their future was tied with other industrial centres. With this merger the industrial and labour acts of India and Bombay State became applicable to these industrial centres. This was a great change in the trade union movement.

After the merger of Aundh state again Kirloskar Workers' Union was appointed as arbitrator. From Company's side Advocate Narayan Swami and from Union's side, Advocate Comrade K.T. Sule and Comrade K.N. Jogalekar worked in the case. Arbitrator agreed workers' demand of Scale-grade. But court gave the responsibility of gradation of the individual worker's scale to the officers of

the company. One shrewd officer⁶ took the advantage of court's judgement and all skilled workers were graded as unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Naturally, the skilled workers were not benefitted by this gradation. But the union was firm. They asked International Labour Organisation for the instructions about grades. They studied the books on this issue and the grades in other similar industries.⁷

In due course, Union made four grades, namely, unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and technicians according to job evaluation. After the prolonged procedures in labour court the company agreed to compromise. After mutual discussions, according to work the grades were fixed. There were some differences of opinion. But the company and the union agreed to mediation of Shantanurao Kirloskar, the nephew of Shankarrao Kirloskar. The union was successful to fulfil their demands and Shantanurao also gave justice to workers by accepting their demands. In due course Labour Court gave their consent to this fixation of the grades. After this struggle there was comparatively peaceful atmosphere in the Kirloskarwadi industrial unit till 1960.⁸

Kirloskar Kamgar Union was established in 1940. Till 1960 it remained representative union in that area. It was under INTUC influence. Other parties like PWP and Communists tried to establish their units. They managed to establish small unions which were not recognised unions. But leaders of these unions like V.D. Chitale and Bhagwanrao Suryavanshi co-operated with

INTUC union in the issues of dearness allowance, leave benefit, compensations in accidents according to Factory Act, Provident Fund, gratuity, bonus, scale-grade, etc. The workers in 'Kirloskar Factory' were active in political activities like 'Quit India' movement of 1942 or Samyukta Maharashtra Movement. They were active in other trade union movements also. Kirloskar Kamgar Union leaders helped to organise other unions at Ogalewadi, Satara Road, Madhavnagar, Sangli etc. They organised some conferences of the workers. Kulkarni Master was selected as a workers' representative in the Factory Committee of the Kolhapur Region.⁹

With these big industrial units small scale industry workers also started to organise after independence. Satara District Motor Kamgar Union was established in March, 1947. Rahiman Abus Momin was elected President and Krishnaji Waman Acharya was elected as Secretary, the membership being 220.¹⁰ Some disputes also started in scattered area on various issues. On 25th May, 1948 Panchgani Municipal Sweepers went on two days' strike. Their demand was increase in their wages. Twenty workers were involved in dispute. The dispute ended in favour of the workers.¹¹ At Karad the dispute was started in Phadke Industrial Works Ltd. on 22nd June, 1948. The company dismissed two workers. The workers demanded reinstatement of these two workers. The strike ended on 23 June and 51 workers were involved in it. The strike ended in favour of the employers.¹² These types of disputes were going on in smaller units like silk factory at Satara (which

was closed in 1960) or Municipal workers of Satara, Karad etc. But in early fifties big troubles started in Satara Road Factory.

After independence, the Solapur living index was made applicable to the factory workers in Satara district. But workers were not getting dearness allowance according to this index. So, they went on strike in July, 1951. Government appointed Salim Merchant Commission. The dispute ended in favour of the workers. Solapur index was made applicable, gradation was fixed, workers got benefit of leave. The local leaders were Tushar Pawar, Babu Kondi Shingare, Aba Khadkikar etc. All of them were communists. Outside leaders like Shankarrao More, Baburao Jagtap and Gulabrao Ganacharya also visited Satara Road and gave guidance. The strike continued for more than 50 days.¹³

In 1952, central Minister of Civil Supplies, Shri Kanhyalal Munshi declared openly to have given licence to produce oil engines to Coopers. Within a short time there was a huge stock of oil-engines which was sufficient for all India's two years' necessity. The demand for oil engines suddenly fell down and depression started in that industry. Cooper Engineering Works was mainly producing oil engines. Naturally, depression hit the factory. Huge stock of engines remained unsold. At the end of 1952 the Company declared lock out. The company asked workers to go on two months compulsory leave. One European A.J. Lund was working as the General Manager in the factory from 1944. In March 1953, Lund gave the workers an option that half of the workers

should work for 15 days and the remaining half for the next fifteen days. The workers who were living in the factory's colony did not agree to this because they were completely dependent on the income from the factory-work, while the workers coming from the surrounding area had some income from land.

Even while giving fifteen days' work the Company showed favouritism to some workers. Unbearing all this the workers entered the factory asking to give work for all. They gheraoed the Manager Lund from evening of the 9th March to the early morning of 10th March. Their only demand was to lift up the lock-out. D.S.P. Luis gave the threat of firing but the workers were firm. On the 10th morning Lund signed the papers agreeing to give them work. He then went to Satara to meet Mr. Cooper and from there he went to Bombay to meet Chief Minister Morarji Desai.

On 22nd March the Company declared lock-out. In early morning before the workers came on the work the notice of lock-out was put on the Notice Board. State Reserve Police was stationed around the Factory. Eight days' pay was sanctioned to the workers. Lund gave resignation of his post and M.M. Doshi was appointed as the Acting General Manager. Workers tried to enter the factory premises but they were beaten by the State Reserve Police. The meeting of Union's Managing Body was held in the Union's office. But police arrested all 52 members of the Managing Body. The workers included in this arrest were Vishnu Babar, Shriram Raoji

Bhosale, Namdeo Nathaji Bhosale, Gulab Narayan Jadhav, Sadashiv Balwant Jadhav, Mahipati Bala Wagh, Rajaram Ramchandra Patil, Laxman Walopkar, R.D. Chavan, Dnyandeo Varkar, Amrut Bhosale, Shankar Jaggannath Hate etc. Nath Ghanekar and Tushar Pawar took the meeting at the outskirts of Padali. This time the movement against the land fragmentation and consolidation Act was going on in the vicinity of Padali. The people in that movement were associated with the workers' movement also. So, in spite of police threat the crowd of 100-200 people held a public meeting. But the S.R.P. resorted to Lathi Charge. The meeting was dispersed. The District Superintendent of Police, Luis, put restriction on the leaders like Tushar Pawar and Govindrao Bapu Tambve that they should not enter the district of Satara for two years. But order was applicable only for state area, the area under central government was not included in the said order. So, Tushar Pawar used to take meetings in the premises of Satara Road railway station as that area was under the Central Government. He used to come by railway from Kolhapur, take meeting and go back by the next train.

Ten days after the notice the company paid eight days' pay to the workers. Service-break was given. After some years when Bombay Government passed the Act for the workers' gratuity the workers of Satara Road were not eligible due to this service break. After some time the Company started taking back the workers on duty. Till the month of August about 200 workers were taken back. In August factory started working. Slowly all old workers

were taken on old scale and on same posts. The economic loss of the workers was too much. But in spite of the loss, according to Tushar Pawar, the Act was a new addition to the existing Industrial Acts and it gave an impetus to trade union movement. This addition was Industrial Disputes Act 25 F.F., according to which compensation has been given to the workers for the period of lock-outs, lay-off pay and retrenchment compensation was also given with this amendment. This was a great achievement of Satara Road dispute of 1952-53.¹⁴ The questions were asked in Parliament, on this strike.

In 1953, some leaders from Satara, like M.D. Deshpande, B.A. Patil, Eknath Phalke, Ramu Jadhav etc. started unregistered local union. This union was under the influence of management. With the execution of five-year plan the factory had flourishing business. In 1955 this union was merged with the INTUC union. From that time there was no strike or any dispute. From 1959 workers started getting bonus and gratuity on basic pay. The atmosphere became peaceful.

Like Aundh, Phaltan State also merged in Indian territory in December 1947. On 1st January 1948 with the help of communists the Phaltan Taluka Union was established. In the start only Sakharwadi workers were the members of the Union. One thousand workers of the factory became members and about one thousand workers who were working on the Company's farm also became members of the Union. After forming the taluka union, the Union

could solve many problems of the workers. In initial stages workers had only Rs. eleven and ten annas pay per week. Slowly it went upto Rs. 650 per month.

Until 1950 Dada Nalawade and Babanrao Hadsul were important local leaders. Communist leaders were also guiding and helping the union in various ways. In 1951, Haribhau Nimbalkar and Rajanikant Hirve also came in prominence in the Union. In 1956-57 the Union struggled for confirmation of the services of workers. The company used to take labour services on contracts in which workers had no guarantee of the service. The Union demanded that all workers should be taken on the pay-roll of the company, so that workers would have guarantee of service. First the company did not agree to the workers' demand, but the union fought the case upto the Supreme Court, in which dispute ended when workers won the case. Permanent presenty record was maintained by the company and workers had the guarantee of their services. From then onwards there was no big dispute. Minor differences were solved by the mutual discussions between the Union and the management.¹⁵

Compared to Kirloskarwadi, Sakharwadi and Satara Road Unions, Ogalewadi Union was not active in workers' problem. But in 1948, Government passed the B.I.R. Act under which provision was made to accord recognition to a union, which commands the largest number of membership, as a representative union. This entails privileges like functioning as the sole bargaining agent

of the workers. By this act INTUC had been recognised as representative union in many places, but in Ogalewadi, the union was run by the communists. So, to protest against B.I.R. Act Ogalewadi Union declared a political strike in 1952, which continued for 50 days. This was purely a political strike in which no other demands were included. Of course, strike ended without any decision or benefit for the workers.¹⁶ It seems that Ogalewadi workers were politically more awakened, They took part in 1942 Quit India movement, Goa Freedom Movement and of course, Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, but they were somewhat passive in trade union movement.

Till 1955, in Satara district, communists were powerful in trade unions, especially big industrial centres. But slowly except Phaltan their place was taken by INTUC. From 1955 the number of unions under Lal Nishan Party increased. They had strong State-wide unions of Buildings and Communication Department's workers, Kotwals' union and Maharashtra State Electricity Board's unions which were spread in Satara district. Other than these there were small unions of municipal workers. Socialists did not have any foothold except S.T. Workers' Union, in the district. Other factors were also changing. Satara is basically an agrarian district, where sugarcane plantation and other cash crops like tobacco were increasing. With the increase in cash crops other employment in fitting of pipe-lines, transport by trucks and bullock-carts were also increasing. But yet no body has tried to

organise them. Similarly, in rural areas the classes among peasants as rich peasant, middle-class peasant, poor peasant and landless labourers, have grown. With this possibly the class consciousness may grow if proper atmosphere is created.

In trade union movement there were changing tendencies. From the Second Five Year Plan onwards the Government has taken the stand that labour is the creator of the wealth and hence he should be protected. So, Government is taking steps towards labour legislation. In 1957, Government appointed All India Wage Board. The aim of the Board was that the labour should get incentive and living wage, which means wage according to current living index. For which revival of the wages from time to time was necessary. The vast gap between living index and actual wages should decrease. The Board had to give the causes, if living wage was not possible. This means the increase in workers' wages. Textile industrialists opposed this Government's move because textile industry is the biggest industry in India, so they were the sufferers. At last rupees 10 increase was given to all workers in total wage of the individual.

Another tendency of going back to native village after the retirement is also decreasing among workers in big industrial centres, especially in Bombay. Next generation of the workers is taking education in the cities and has a tendency to work in the clerical jobs than working as labourer like the previous generations. The tendency of investing capital in villages is also

decreasing. The workers from all places of Maharashtra and outside Maharashtra were coming to seek employment in Bombay. Naturally, the leadership was also changing. In initial stages the leadership of INTUC was from Konkan in the form of P.K. Sawant and Ambedkar, then it changed to Vasant Rao Patil and Deshpande and recently it was taken over by Br. Rajani Patel and Hoshing. It was changing regionwise from where the number of workers were more. But the cosmopolitan leadership of Patel and Hoshing showed the complete urbanisation or proletarianisation of the workers, which means that the rural attachments are decreasing. This is a good sign for the betterment of trade union movement.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Mathur, A.S. and Mathur, J.S., Trade Indian Movement in India, pp. 45-47.
- 2 Surana, Pannalal, article in "Maharashtra - A Profile", Op.cit., p. 530.
- 3 Ibid., p. 531.
- 4 Notes of Kulkarni Master, and Interview of Bhagwanrao Suryawanshi, the leader of P.W.P., Sangli.
- 5 Notes of Kulkarni Master, Op.cit.
- 6 Kulkarni Master used the word "Shakuni Mama" for this officer, the famous crooked character in Mahabharata, but he had not given the name of the officer.
- 7 Notes of Kulkarni Master.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Labour Gazetteer, 1947, p. 1369.
- 11 Ibid., p. 1570.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Interview of S.D. Bhagwat, retired assistant general manager, Satara Road, who gave me the details of the strike including the year and month, which was supported by another worker, Narayanrao Lohar. They were not sure whether the days lost were 53 or 56.

- 14 The account of this dispute of 1952-53 has been taken from the interviews of S.D. Bhagwat, Vishnu Ganapati Babar from Bhaktavadi, Jagannath Vithoba Hate, Vithoba Bhiku Roman, Narayanrao Lohar, Tryambak Gopalrao Phalke (the present General Secretary of Cooper Kamgar Sangh) and Arjunrao Jadhav (the present President of Cooper Kamgar Sangh) and the articles of Shri Tushar Pawar and Tryambak Gopalrao Phalke in the souvenir of Silver Jubilee of Cooper Kamgar Sangh, Satara Road, published in 1981.
- 15 Interviews of Dada Nalawade and Haribhau Nimbalkar who was M.L.A. and is still active in the Union.
- 16 Interview of Rajaram Patil, a communist worker and Labour Gazetteer, 1952.