

Com C Balaya

A short biogeographical note on Com C Balaya interviewed in Kadapa on September 26, 2004

C Balaya was born on November 26, 1926 in a family of weavers. In his village alone, there were 30000 looms.

Every family had several looms and used to weave yarn of 60 count which is very fine. They used to weave saris with beautiful designs and colour combinations and fine white dhotis that were popular in Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Bihar and also in Dacca, the then capital of East Bengal. There was also available coarse material for poor families.

Balaya was engaged starching the clothes with Ganji, a preparation of rice. The weavers used to get only Rs ten for twelve saris. The entire family together used to weave fourteen to fifteen saris and the monthly income was never more than Rs 15-16.

Balaya was a Congress worker then and was impressed by Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Prakash Pantulu and Gandhiji. When Gandhi gave a call for Khadi, the weavers got organised and started supplying khadi.

It was a time when supply of raw material was almost stopped and there was drought too. Balaya started taking meetings of the weavers. He had addressed at least 300 meetings in this period. The weavers formed Cheneta Congress (Weavers' congress) of which membership fee was twentyfive paise. There were 8000 weavers in the organisation that spread in other districts too.

In 1951, there was relay hunger strike by the weavers for yarn in Madras and every district was represented.

Later the weavers were given a card according to his capacity and got yarn accordingly. A minimum of ten laddis (a measurement of yarn) of yarn was given to each weaver on this card.

There was a satyagraha for 53 days and everyday police used to pick up the agitators and leave them twenty to thirty miles away to disrupt the movement. There was a move by textile mill owners to stop handlooms and hence the businessmen refused to increase the prices.

It was at this stage, that Naxalites entered the scene and organised a separate weavers' union in Poddatore village led by Dr MV Ramana Reddy between 1967-'70. As the struggle turned violent, several persons got killed. In 1985, the followers of Ramana Reddy attacked Balaya also.

Balaya joined AITUC in the post independence period and organised cooperative too.

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