

Ref no. : \_\_\_\_\_

Cassette no.12

Name	Sonabai Barku Chavan
Gender	Female
Age	67
Religion	Hindu
Caste	Chamar
Profession	Retired as worker
Type of work	Doubling and winding
Category	Badli
Address	39/2866, Abhuday Nagar, Kala Chowki, Mumbai-33
Telephoe	4701345
Mother's Profession	Fruit vendor
Father's Profession	Mill worker

Siblings

Shivram Bhiku Surve	Died	Mill worker
Dagdo Bai	Died	House Wife
Shankuntala	50	House wife

Name	Age	Education	Profession
Eknath Chavan	39	12 <sup>th</sup> Pass	Port Employee
Suman Jadhav	53	Illiterate	House wife
Kamal Vetal	42	3 <sup>rd</sup> Pass	House wife
Vimal Khade	36	4 pass	House wife

**Political affiliation/sympathy:**

Pre textile strike -1970 to 1982	Congress
During Strike -	Kamgar Aghadi
Post textile strike - 1983 to 1990's	Non political

## INTERVIEW WITH SONABAI CHAVAN

*Your name?*

-Sonabai Chavan

*Why did the textile workers go on strike?*

-They wanted more bonus and the workload was too much. They wanted a wage rise. Eight Mills were closed at that time. Datta Samant took meetings of the textile workers at that time. These meetings were in support of the workers in the eight mills. Workers insisted on declaring a strike in support of the issues raised in these mills. Datta Samant had in fact cautioned against it

*What happened in your mill on the first day of the strike?*

-We had gone to work as usual in the morning. As I took wash and was getting ready to start the work around 9.30 a.m., we heard people shouting, bandh! bandh! Then we could not do any thing. All the workers went out of the mill.

*Which was your union before the strike?*

-I was with Sangh that is R.M.M.S.

*Is it true that Sangh people were beaten up during the strike?*

-When the strike was in full swing some of the R.M.M.S. leaders started forcing the workers to resume work. The striking workers beat up two to three such people, at that time. These Sangh people were then admitted to Gandhi hospital.

When Mr. Bhosle was the C.M. he had offered to have a dialogue with Dr. Datta Samant to reach a compromise through dialogue. Do you think it would have been proper to compromise then?

-It would have been good. But the workers insisted on having no compromise without a total agreement on their demands. They expected to have a total victory like in other companies under Dr. Datta Samant's leadership. I do not remember any discussion among the workers about having a compromise.

*Do you distinctly remember any incidents of the strike period?*

-People could not eat regular three meals in that period. Many had problems having even a single meal a day. People started accepting jobs with wages as low as 10 to 15 rupees a day. I can not describe how they managed themselves, where all they dispersed and how they survived. We were all in a very bad shape.

*How did your family manage to survive in strike period?*

-I was alone with my five children. There was no other earning man in the house. I used to sell vegetables and make the two ends meet.

*What was the reaction of your children?*

-There were problems someone did not have pen or another did not have proper books. Children did not have proper chappals or even proper clothes to go to school.

*Were the children agitated? Did they complain about the strike?*

-Yes they used to say that strike brought them misery. They felt bad because it came in the way of their education and because they could not have proper meals.

*Are you now a member of any political party or did you belong to any party earlier before the strike period?*

-We had such heavy workload in the mills that we did not have any time for any political party. If we faced any problems, we used to approach Sangh. That was like our party. We used to pay them our monthly dues.

*Are you proud of the things you did during the strike?*

-We supported the strike. But we could be happy if the strike had succeeded. Instead things became worse for us. So, there is nothing to feel proud about. We could not even afford proper meals so there are no happy memories.

*When Dr. Datta Samant at one point asked the workers whether he strike should be withdrawn, why did the workers refuse?*

-Workers felt that since the workers from other companies like Hind Cycles, tier company and many others had victorious struggles under Dr. Datta Samant's Leadership, the textile workers too had to win fully. They felt that strike would be a sure success. That is the reason, workers refused to compromise at that time.

*Did you loose your job after the strike?*

- Workers from our mill got letters from the management, urging us to resume work. I got a letter too. They also offered to give us our dues if we desired to resign.

*So you got the job?*

Yes, after a gap of nine months I resumed work. This time the workload increased even more than before. We had to work twice more than before.

*What is the reason for the failure of the strike?*

-There was a lot of violence during the strike. Many workers could not even get out of their homes during the strike. How can we feel proud about such things? We did not achieve anything. It was in support of the workers in the eight mills that we had gone on strike.

*But what was the reason for he failure of the strike? Can we blame any individual in particular for the failure of the strike?*

-Workers had insisted going on the strike. Datta Samant at that stage was saying, let us first deal with the situation in the eight mills separately. He said that we could at the most go for a sit in strike in support. He said this in a public meeting and asked the workers to raise the hands either in support of what he said or in support of the total strike. The workers insisted on declaring a total strike. They were responsible. Workers did not listen. They insisted that there would not be any success without a strike.

*Do you mean to say that workers were responsible for the failure and not Dr. Datta Samant?*

-How could Datta Samant be wrong? He was supporting the workers. He even distributed grain and money among the workers.

*Did any other organisation help during the strike?*

-No! Mainly Datta Samant helped.

*What is the situation in the mills today?*

-Fewer workers are going to the mills today. Some of them get work. Even if they get to work they do not receive salaries on time. Payment sometimes is delayed up to two to three months. Earlier payment used to be made exactly on 10<sup>th</sup> every month. I have no first hand knowledge about these things, but this is what I get to hear from the others.

*Can you say that Shines helped the workers during the strike?*

-No they did not help in any way. But, one red flag person I think, by the name Kulkarni used to take meetings, urging workers to resume work. His advice was to continue struggle but to resume work. People heeded to such things. They were loyal to Datta Samant. What they forgot was that Dr. Datta Samant had appealed to workers not to go on strike in the first place.

*What has R.M.M.S. done for the mill workers?*

They did not do anything for the mill workers. First they used to collect one rupee per month, then they started taking five rupees. Additionally, they used to collect rupees ten or more once in a while when workers received any extra payment for bonus or things like that. We used to complain about the management to the union. I don't know what they used to do about these complaints. They always told us to work harder.

*What are the people who lost their jobs doing now?*

-Some went back to village. Some died. Some lost their houses in the city. Many workers have simply perished. Hardly one fourth of the work force is still in the mills. Many others are doing low paid jobs in the city.

*What happened to the workers who took their VRS or other dues?*

-Most people did not benefit in that manner. Even after working for more than ten years in the mills, workers did not receive any such dues after the strike.

*What about those workers who actually got the dues?*

-They benefited.