

Ved Prakash Kohli, Railways, BMS, BRMS, Category-wise Union Leader (Stenographers union, Ghaziabad)

Name	Ved Prakash Kohli, Railways, BMS, BRMS, Category-wise Union Leader i.e. Stenographers Union, Ghaziabad.
Date of Interview	22 October 2002.
Time	1.00pm to 3.00pm.
Place	At his home in Ghaziabad (UP)
Context	Ved Prakash Kohliji is a partition returnee and has been a Sangh member from his early days in those days in present day Pakistan. He lives in a house built on plot land in Ghaziabad in an area that is somewhat quite. He is a simple man, short in height and very courteous in his manners. He is somewhat cynical of political parties and leaders whom he feels use workers for the fulfillment of their political goals. He from his interview came across as man who was not for violence in trade unionism and was for peaceful settlements. Also he avoided big leadership positions or responsibilities even though BMS offered it to him. He stuck to his steno union and there to gave the leadership later to others. He worked for the category of workers he belonged to i.e. stenos. He did not like strikes and even was skeptical of the 1974 railway strike though he did join in when other workers joined in i.e. stenos. However he seemed an honest man and didn't look like one who ever wanted power or position
Interviewers	Bobby Poulouse

Biographical Sketches

He was born in Lahore in February 1933. Father a clerk in office and mother a teacher. From childhood his family was in RSS. Studied in DAV school in those days in today's Pakistan. Did LLB and diploma in journalism. Joined as steno at Baroda House in Delhi. Then at the pushing of friends one of the main founders of All India Railway Stenos Association (AIRSA). He felt they were getting a bad deal and his strategy was negotiations and without strikes he got the pay scales for the stenos. It was a great victory. The reason he made one Congress MP the President of his association while he was first general secretary and Duttopant Thengdi the patron. So some political patronage helped. Did not participate in 1960 and 1968 strikes. But did participate in 1974 strike and was jailed but was disillusioned by it as he saw closely the George Fernandes and others were running a political strike. He worked in Uttar Railway Karamchari Union an affiliate of BMS. Was offered the post of Sec. General in BRMS but declined. Retired as Chief Law Assistant. He worked mainly for stenos.

Transcript Summary

Ved Prakash Kohli was born in Lahore in February 1933 and came from a lower middle class background. His father worked in an office and mother was a teacher in a school. He had two brothers and three sisters. He was influenced by RSS due to its spirit of dedication and was a follower since younger days. In 1937 his family shifted to Rawalpindi and did his middle school there at DAV school. After the partition his family moved to India and settled in Hardwar in present day Uttarakhand. There he studied at Pannalal Bhalla Municipal Inter College. Then he joined service in Ration Department in Hardwar. Simultaneously he continued his education privately. Then he moved to Bhopal where he took up job at the Central Tractor Organization as a stenographer. Simultaneously his education was continuing privately and cleared LLB and diploma in journalism. From Bhopal he was selected into railways and joined at Baroda House (Delhi) as a stenographer. As a stenographer at Baroda House Ved Prakash Kohliji realized that the condition of stenographers was bad and they needed justice. He being somewhat more educated his colleges pushed him to look after the affairs of the stenographers. Thus along with others he formed the All India Stenographers Association whose patron was Shri. Dattopant Thengdi and Thakur Raghunath Singh a Congress MP and Gen. Sec. of the Congress Parliamentary Party was made the General Secretary of the Stenographers Association. The demands regarding revision of pay scales was placed before the Railway Board and got some of the demands accepted. The All India Railway Stenographers Association (AIRSA) was formed in 1963-64 and he was the first General Secretary till 1968-69. Kohliji narrated how without any strike or violence but by negotiations he got raises for the salaries of the stenos. It was a big achievement as they were a category-wise union not having any recognition and the recognized unions were not particularly helpful towards their demands. As regards the 1960 strike Ved Prakash Kohli did not participate in it. Between 1968 and 1970 the exact date he did not remember Ved Prakash Kohli said he was offered Deputy Secretary General post of BRMS. However he refused as it was a bad time personally for his as he had got divorced in 1974. He also worked with Thengdiji in the Uttar Railway Karamchari Union (URKU). He also did not participate in the 1968 strike. As regards the 1974 railway strike initially he did not participate but later seeing the momentum he joined in along with the other stenos. He was jailed in the 1974 railway strike. However he said that his fears came true when he saw the way George Fernandes and others handled the strike. According to him he saw personally in the jail how the strike was not about workers rather it had political motives. Ved Prakash Kohli said that he became a Law Assistant and retired as a Chief Law Assistant from railways. Overall he did his bit in the stenographers movement and kept out bigger railway trade union positions and struggles.