

Vasant Gupte (President of the textile workers' union called Mill Mazdoor Sabha affiliated to HMS and Director, Maniben Kara Institute)

A short biographical note on Vasant Gupte interviewed by Anil Rajimwale on June 16, 2003 in Mumbai

I was born on May 9, 1928 at Panvel near Mumbai. I am graduate of law and was in Rashtriya Sewa Dal. I was active in Socialist party in college and founded a unit in Panvel as well in 1949. My father was in Congress and worked in the Revenue department. He had left his job at the call of Gandhi in 1937 and contested on Congress ticket and became first president of the municipality. At this time, I was a student and worked in Congress but later joined the socialists.

After LLB, I practised law for a year then shifted to Bombay and worked with NV Phadke for a few years. But all the time I wanted to work for the workers' union. In 1950, I was taken to Mill Mazdoor Sabha. Since then I have contested thousands of workers' cases without charging and won in 95 percent cases.

It was a time when bonus issue was coming up and decision was taken by one lakh workers at Kamgar Maidan to go on strike which continued for 60 days and was exclusively led by HMS. There was firing too. I was looking after the legal issues and was asked by the leadership not to get arrested.

Finally after 60 days, another meeting was held at Kamgar Maidan attended by 2 lakh workers and by secret ballott it was decided to end the strike. The workers never resorted to violence.

Meanwhile education for the workers was also in progress in parks, gardens or under any tree. Later HMS got a plot in Khandala where the programmes are arranged for 15 to 20 days for workers.

In 1980, the HMS wanted me to work on the workers' education and in memory of Maniben Kara the institute was founded of which I was made the director.

In the Mill Mazdoor Sabha, there is no interference from the political parties. For settlement of workers problems, In fact, the union never approached ministers.

Since December, 1974, I was working at the national level of HMS as secretary. I left for a few years when my wife died in 1978 but in 1981, I was again made secretary.

I was awarded Ford Foundation fellowship to work on labour issues. My book has come out that covers upto independence.

My union consists of textile processing and hoisery workers.

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