

Tarun Maitra, Former Secretary of All Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Union, Calcutta

Name	Tarun Maitra, Former Secretary of All Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Union, Calcutta
Date of Interview	February 5, 2003
Place	Calcutta
Context	Tarun Maitra had a paralytic attack few years back and since then he is confined in his house. He was himself a jute mill worker and was not given any pension or provident fund. His wife was the principal of a school run by the jute mill owners and was forced to retire without any compensation. Both of them live in utter penury and disillusionment.
Interviewers	Krishna Jha

Biographical Sketches

I do not remember the day and month but I was born sometime in 1925. My father was doctor but died early leaving all of us helpless and without any means to subsist. We had days when there was nothing to eat. Mother wept when I went to school only after taking a glass of water. I managed to study upto school final with great difficulty and then joined jute mill as worker.

In the mill I realised that trade union was the only way to fight for our rights and I joined AITUC. Till then I was a Congress person.

In 1953, there was a mass movement among jute workers which brought together other workers too on bonus issue. Till then bonus act was non-existent. The strike continued for a month and workers even gheraoed the Writers' Building facing incessant rains. Bidhan Chandra Roy was the Chief Minister. He wanted that the strike must be withdrawn and then only negotiations would take place. Jute workers alongwith others were against it.

It was the first organised movement of jute workers though the trade union was organised long back in 1930 under the leadership of Bankim Mukherjee but then slogan was only "beat the management". Those days also bonus issue was raised but could not take a popular form. It was only in 1953, that the movement spread like wild fire.

Finally three tribunals were set up and wage board came. Raghunath Reddy was Labour Minister and offered suggestions to meet the demands of the workers. One of the prime demand was to regularise those who were working as replacement workers which was conceded.

There were several strikes after that. Soon there was another strike which continued upto 80 days. He did not remember the date. Chief Minister Bidhan Roy said if the workers went for organised retreat then only talks would be conducted.

I feel that the British were better task masters as they were concerned about the workers too compared to the present day management. The British used to offer the workers quarters and other facilities like playing ground and entertainment but the present day management wants to exploit the labour power without giving anything in return.

Transcript Summary

Tarun Maitra was born sometime in 1925. His father was doctor but died early leaving the family without any means to subsist. Tarun studied upto school final with great difficulty and then joined jute mill as worker. He was a Congress person since childhood. But after joining the jute mill, he started trade union.

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Tarun Maitra was critical of the present day management and compared their work style with British who offered the workers quarters and other facilities like playing ground and entertainment.

Tarun Maitra as a leader of jute workers had to face the ire of other trade unions as well. He claimed that in 1960, INTUC workers tried to assassinate him but was saved. According to him, the attitude of CITU was also not friendly.