

Sitaram Ramchandra Jagtap, (AITUC), Bombay

A short biographical note on Com Sitaram Jagtap (AITUC), Bombay interviewed on July 28, 2004, Bombay

Comrade Sitaram Jagtap was born sometime in July, 1927 at Sripore village in Madangarh Taluka in Ratnagiri district in a agriculturist family. He had to leave school as his father, Shri Ramchandra Jagtap was not able to finance his studies.

Jagtap came to Bombay in 1937 looking for a job. In the beginning he took up small jobs. His aunt was working in Srinivas Textile mills. She took him to the mill though he was too young to be employed there. For sometime he learnt the work there and then worked for almost six months. After that he joined Saksaria Textile Mills, now called Bombay Textile Mills. He was given job in the warping section with a salary of Rs 20 per month.

It was in the Saksaria mill that Jagtap came in contact with the communists who were popularly called Lal Baotawale (red flag holders). The communists leaders like SA Dange, Mirajkar, Patkar were frequent visitors there. Meetings used to start from 6 am and go on till late night. On every issue, attempts were made to cover all the shifts.

On the issues of bonus, wage hike and victimisation, everybody used to be interested. It was at this point that to negotiate on bonus issue, a representative was needed and the union asked Jagtap to contest as it was to be decided by election. However Jagtap was elected unopposed. At this time, 4000 workers were engaged in the mill in three shifts.

In 1946, Jagtap and his comrades went on strike and were supported by almost all the workers. However, Jagtap was soon thrown out of job. At this time he was president of the Girni Kamgar union. Jagtap attended the Calcutta session of the AITUC and was elected to its general council.

From Sholapur, coal was sent to run the Saksaria mills. But after second world war, there was acute crisis of coal and several shifts were closed. Jagtap came to Sholapur and there was a meeting attended by 10000 workers.

After Jagtap lost his job in Saksaria, someone asked him to meet Panse, a size master in China mills to get a job there. Jagtap was taken in and remained there for three years.

It was a time when all the CPI leaders were in jail and movement was in the hands of young people like Jagtap. There was a public rally in Lalbagh attended by 3000 workers where the only speaker was Jagtap. From there, a demonstration started and police opened fire killing Bhiku Kulelkar at Bilal road. Several were wounded but escaped. However, Jagtap asked Dr Sawant, an under ground comrade for advice. He asked Jagtap to join his duties. The next day police came at the factory gate and arrested alongwith 56 others. After three months he was released.

Jagtap was a popular leader and supported by even "Lal Nishan" and Rashtriya Majoor Mahajan workers.

In 1950, Jagtap joined Kamla Mill and worked there for nine years. Soon Jagtap contested for Bombay corporation councillor's post and got elected in 1961. The entire area was dominated by workers. Jagtap organised a housing society for the "Jhopadpatti dwellers", called Ganapati society. Jagtap was its president.

Jagtap also organised the unorganised workers under the banner of Brihan Maharashtra Bhade Karu Parishad, a front that constituted of Republican party, Praja Samajwadi Party and the Communist Party and continued even after the communist Party was split.

Split in the Communist movement had an adverse effect. Though CPI(M) has no hold over textile workers, but has units in the engineering sector.

Girni Kamgar union was not a recognised union but had mill committees inside 50 factories in Bombay. here were 700 committee members. Total membership was 250 lakh.

Jagtap was keen to study further and he used to read books under the bridge in the light of a lamp post.

Jagtap had organised the bidi workers in Bidi Kamgar union, Gharelu Kamgar Union, milkmen's informal organisation and its movement to get fair price, Hawkers' union, Construction workers' union. Jagtap opened schools in Ratnagiri tehsil when he was a corporator and now colleges also.

Jagtap always wanted to build up the organisation and keep the factional fights outside the limits.

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