

Transcriptive notes based on interview

(10) P D Gandhi (Gujarat)

I am known as Purushottam Das Gandhi. I am clarifying it to save confusion since there are so many PD Gandhis! My date of birth is 11 January 1928. I belong to Jamnagar in Saurashtra. Jamnagar was a famous princely state.

Do you know how my date of birth was confirmed? It was when my mother said it was on "the day Viceroy visited Jamnagar." That day turned out to be 11 January. However discrepancy was there even then and real date was mentioned as January 13 and not January 11. Eventually January 11 stuck to me as the day when I was born.

I was very active as a student in social, political and cultural fields. When the call for participation in '42 movement was given in Jamnagar, I responded immediately. We organised sabotage in and around Jamnagar and got arrested. However on the grounds of being underage, I was released and the Queen herself asked me to keep off politics and concentrate on studies.

I met several literary figures in the course of my youth movement work. I also came in contact with the famous socialist youth leader Yusuf Maheraly.

I was sent to Bombay and later Kanpur by my guardians. Their aim was to keep me away from politics, but the reverse happened. I joined a mill in Bombay as a clerk and organised the clerks in textile mills and formed Bombay Textile Mill Clerks' Union in 1946. I got highest number of votes in the union elections and became joint secretary. I came in touch with famous trade union leaders in Bombay and Kanpur. Meanwhile I organised the sweepers in Jamnagar. I used to take food with them which was quite shocking for the community those days.

I worked in a large number of unions in Bombay like Goanese workers in Mazegaon Docks, banks, textiles etc. We organised a 12-day strike of textile workers alongwith Ashok Mehta protesting against the recommendations of the Wage Committee of Bombay Government.

The Sikka strike in Jamnagar in 1951 became famous because teargas was used for the first time and even BBC made a broadcast of the news. We compelled Digvijay Cement to pay for the strike period. I joined at first as a store keeper but soon got involved in trade union activities and organised them in a union! I also worked among the salt workers on the sea shores. Salt workers' movement in Salaya became famous for the militancy of the workers. We had launched several strikes that continued for quite long periods.

I also organised a movement that had its own significance in the context. The harijan workers were given the job that was called "to suck the shuttle". Earlier the high caste workers had never accepted to touch the shuttles that were used by the harijans this way but after the agitation they had to surrender. We also "liberated" several parts of Okha in 1952.

Later I became a councillor and then a legislator in mid '50s and continued to be for almost a decade and a half. I remember one of my first achievements when we reached a decision unanimously except one oppositon to take the lives of the stray dogs who had

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been growing in number. We were about to start implementation when the opposing member, a devout and pious Jain councillor, fainted. He was too shocked at the "inhuman violence against the creature"! Any way, I must confess our failure to find a way that could destroy the canine population and also sooth the hurt and justified feelings of our councillor.

Later I became the general secretary of the Saurashtra Regional Trade Union Committee. However, the eruption of communal riots among the workers in 1969 had a stunning effect on me. I had to break away from normal TU work as I was too shocked to continue.

After recovery, I resumed normal trade union work again.

After 1980s, I had to give up active trade union work due to deteriorating health.

(4) **P.D.Gandhi (Gujarat)**

Purushottam Das Gandhi was born on 11th January 1928 in a middle class family in the princely state of Jamnagar, now a district and town of same name in Gujarat. The date was found by referring to the “date when the viceroy visited Jamnagar”, as told by his mother. The date of birth in reality is 13th Jan but 11th Jan has stuck as ‘the date’.

As a young student, ‘PD’, as he is fondly called, joined various literary, semi-political and later, political activities. Nau Jawan Sahitya Sabha got started in the wake of the ’42 movement in Jamnagar. It was here that he met the later famous literary and political figures like Bhanubhai Vyas, “Kavikant”, Shantilal Vasa, and others. He also came in contact with youth and socialist leaders like Yusuf Meherally. The youth and students organised sabotage in Jamnagar and the neighboring states.

Contact with TU movement:

PD was arrested in the ’42 movement and kept in inhuman conditions. He was released on the grounds of being underage, and was lectured to keep off politics by Queen herself, and look after his career! of course, all this was futile.

To keep him away from politics, PD was sent away to Bombay, and then to Kanpur, where he had some relatives. In Bombay PD was a clerk in Mills. In Kanpur, he came in contact with TU leaders like S.S. Yusuf, Sardesai, Shafiq Naqvi etc. PD got his elementary grounding in trade union movement in Kanpur in the Mill Mazdoor Sabha of S.S. Yusuf, PD was soon back to Jamnagar.

One of his first TU activities was among the sweepers in Jamnagar through Safai Karmachari union in the '40s. He and his associates used to take food together with the sweepers in their houses. IT was quite a shocking thing for those times. PD also worked in the Girni Kamgar Union in Bombay, where he spent several years in the '40s.

P.D. was among the organisers and leaders of Bombay Textile Clerks' Union, probably in 1946. They were earlier with INTUC, but later joined the AITUC. INTUC was unseated after a general poll in 14 textile mills. PD was elected joint secretary of the Union, polling a high number of votes.

PD organised and worked in several unions in Bombay in those years: Goanese workers in Mazagaon Docks, Seamen's Union, bank workers, textile workers and several others. In 1948, the wage committee of Bombay govt. made certain recommendations which discriminated against workers of warping and drawing sections. These workers launched various agitation in which PD was very active. In his area, a 12 day strike took place. He collaborated with Ashok Mehta and several other prominent leaders in the agitation. PD was arrested and let out after several months.

In response to his arrest on another occasion the same year, workers in 17 mills in the Sewri Area in Bombay went to strike. PD was in jail for 1 and ½ years in 1948-49. He was externs to the Gujarat area of the Greater Bombay in October '50.

In Gujarat TU movement:

PD joined as storekeeper in a cement factory near Ahmedabad, but he continued his TU activities. In 1951, he formed a strong Union of all the workers including casual workers, and they later on went on a general strike.

In 1951 also took place the famous Sikka strike in Jamnagar. It became famous because it was the first time that the tear-gas was used, which was reported on BBC radio.

PD was among those leaders who compelled the Digvijay Cement Factory to pay for the strike period, which had lasted 17 days.

PD Gandhi was active among the Salt workers too, who worked on the salty water-shores to prepare salt out of the sea-water. He was in the thick of their movements in a place called Salaya, which became famous for and synonymous with workers' militant movements. A particular strike of salt workers lasted for 17 days.

Besides, PD Gandhi led and organised movements for wage rise, workers' union in Maharana Textile Mills in Porbandar, Tata Mills, Petroleum workers in Okha, etc. in 1952. In a notable movement, he got the Harijans the right to "suck" the shuttles by month in weaving sections.

There was particularly a notable movement and strike of workers in Okha in 1952 lasting several days, during which they "liberated" big areas, hoping to spread their movement further.

Between 1952 and 1964, PD led and organised a number of movements, strikes and unions of the labour in various places and industries. In 1953 he was elected a municipal councillor in Porbandar, and his legislative life lasted almost for one-and-a half decade.

He was active in the Kandla port workers, Ganhidham, Bhuj, Rayon workers, teachers, govt. employees and in several other sections and places. He was associated with all India Textile workers' federation and all India port & dock workers' federation.

A Saurashtra Regional TUC (Trade Union Committee) was formed in 1952, and PD became its general secretary.

P.D. was particularly shocked and disillusioned with the communal riots of 1969, which engulfed the working class too in Ahmadabad, and workers killed each other. So shocked was he that he withdrew to Jamnagar, and became active again only after a lapse of time.

After the 1970 split in AITUC leading to formation of CITU, he remained in AITUC becoming a prominent Gujarat and India-level leader.

PD left active TU work in the '80s due to ill health and serious personal troubles. But continues to educate and advice the workers.