

Com Namdeo Ramchandra Shenmare (AITUC), Surat, Gujarat

A brief biographical note on Namdeo Ramchandra Shenmare (AITUC) interviewed in Surat on July 22, 2004

Namdeo Shemare was born on April 21, 1927 in Vathaphali village in Yeotmal district of Maharashtra in a agriculturist family. His father Shri Ramchandra Shenmare was a peasant with a very small land holding. He had ambitions to educate his son properly.

Com Namdeo Shenmare studied in the village school upto primary and was sent to high school in Badnera. He was a brilliant student in school but his family was so poor that his father could not pay the examination fees for appearing in the matriculation examination. It was only for a meagre sum of Rs 5 that Com Shemmare could not appear in the examination,

As a young and spirited person, Shenmare was soon drawn into the labour movement. He was in the AITUC and looking after the textile mill unit in Badnera. There were at least 500 workers in the factory including his two uncles. Another comrade known as Dr Deewan was very active in the area and was instrumental in influencing Shenmare.

Com Shenmare became active in the railwaymen's union too. Between Badnera and Bhusawal, a Communist Party branch was formed. Shenmare was their branch secretary and also trade union unit secretary. He was also Vidarbha party secretary for several years.

After independence, he responded to the call for All India Railwaymen's strike in 1949. He was arrested for his revolutionary activities and was sent to several jails like Amravati, Jabbalpur and Sagar before getting released in 1951.

After coming out of jail, he became a teacher in a school for handicapped in Akola though he did not have even matriculation certificate. Com Shenmare soon left his job and became a whotimer in railways. It was at this time that he married Leela Ben, a simple girl with education upto fourth standard. But as Com Namdeo hisself confesses, "The inspiration for my political career came from Leela only. Living in utter penury and looking after three sons, she always stood by me."

After few months, Com Shenmare was asked to leave for Surat where the textile workers were on the rise. Several senior comrades like Yashwant Chauhan, Vasant Mehendale, Dhanaji Mharte, Nanubhai Desai and his wife Sitaben were active here. They were all living together in a commune and invited Shenmare to join them.

Shenmare joined a small textile mill as a weaver. His first salary was Rs 17. He bought a coat and like other comrades, started to surrender his wages in the commune where they themselves used to cook and eat. Leela Ben too lived with them. She had small kids and no money. The office and commune

were on the first floor and there was only a crumbling staircase. There was no water in the building. Leela used to fetch up buckets of water and cook. It was only when she passed her matriculation examination that she got a job in the municipality as a clerk with a wage of Rs 300 every month and she could feed her kids and husband at least twice a day. But it was only years later.

Com Shenmare was given the charge of forming unions in the textile mills. He was soon thrown out of his job and it became a regular affair. But whenever he was without job, one of his friends, Kantilal Doodhpakwala used to give him shelter and job.

Com Shenmare also organised the Surat corporation workers and formed a union called Sudhrai Mazdoor Union under AITUC. He had led several agitations launched by these workers.

Com Shenmare was also active among sugar workers and in 1979, he became the vice president of the All India Sugar Workers' Federation.

In the textile city of Surat, with its vast number of workers, only two major unions have been historically active, the AITUC and Majoor Mahajan. Both had several clashes between themselves, but both agree that the workers are now indifferent to the movement.

Com Shenmare was felicitated with Nagarik Samman for his contributions in 1991. Apart from Municipal, textile and sugar workers, Com Shenmare had also organised the cinema workers, auto rikshaw drivers, hotel and hospital workers, gram panchayats and khet mazdoor union. One of the unique initiatives taken by Shenmare was to organise the police patils in every village who got a salary of Rs 35 since British days. He brought out several newspapers too called "Praja Awaz", "Awaz" and a fortnightly magazine called "Janata Ka Muktisangharsh".

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