

## **K. Vishwanathan, Jaipur**

Born on 19th Sept. 1931 and originally hails from Kerala. He was brought to Benaras at the age of 2 and 1/2 years by his father, and remained there till the age of 16. In fact, his father acted as a kind of assistant to the 'Pandas' or the religious performers in Benaras. He used to help the pilgrims coming from the South, especially from the Kerala region. K. Vishwanathan began helping his father in this work.

After the death of his father, Vishwanathan went to Calcutta in 1948 after being pressed by his mother, in order to receive education. But he did not get an opportunity for education. Instead he landed up doing sundry jobs. He found helper's job in a restaurant, washing dishes and serving food. He worked as such for 3 years. Later, he worked in a Dry-cleaners factory. Sometime later, he was promoted as the manager of dry-cleaning factory. He even worked as a cook and head cook in various hotels.

Entry into Politics and T.U. movement -

Vishwanathan organised the laundry workers into a Union. There were some 300 to 400 workers there, and they had serious grievances. Vishwanathan came in contact with the various T.U. and political leaders, particularly of the CPI, while in Calcutta. He also organised hotel workers in lower grade employees union. At that time, there existed W.Bengal Motion Pictures Workers' Union led by Haripada Chattopadhyaya. Vishwanathan worked in this Union also. He also played an active part in the Tram workers' strike of July 1953. In the meantime, Vishwanathan joined the Communist Party in 1952.

Shifting to Rajasthan -

During this time, an all India Peace Conference was held in Calcutta. Vishwanathan worked as a volunteer for the same. He came in contact with the Rajasthan delegation. He was already aware of some of the names from Rajasthan through the 'New Age', like H.K. Vyas, Potkar, Swami Kumaranand, etc. Tej Singh Chajed of Rajasthan wanted a pass for the conference Vishwanathan could, after serious efforts, acquire the same for him. Chajed, as a result, was much impressed by and indebted to him. He requested and invited Vishwanathan to come to Rajasthan and work there.

Vishwanathan reached Jaipur on 19th Sept. 1959, and immediately plunged into activities. He mainly worked on the TU front. He initiated an independent PWD workers' union. He also tried to form an union for the technical staff, separate from the PWD workers' union.

Besides, Jaipur Cinema workers' union, Hotel and Restaurant workers' union, etc. were also established or activated. An electricity and water Karmachari union was also

formed, which was an important union. Vishwanathan worked in Vishwakarma Audyogik Mazdoor Union. In 1960, he became the office-secretary of the state Roadways workers' union affiliated to the INTUC. But the very next year, Vishwanathan took it over and got affiliated to AITUC.

Some of the other Unions were: Hair Dressers' (Saloon workers') Union, Photographers' Union, Irrigation workers' union, etc. The movements and processions of the cinema and hotel workers had to be organised in the night-time, as that was the only time they were free.

Split in the T.U. movement:

The conflicts within the CPI intensified during the early '60s. it led to the formation of CPI and CPM as separate parties in the mid-sixties. The dissension and the split had serious and harmful impact on the T.U. and labour movement in Rajasthan. Vishwanathan played a particularly active role in these difficult conditions. He salvaged several unions, and formed many new ones. In fact, with his efforts, there was considerable spread of T.U. movement in general, and of AITUC in particular.

According to K. Vishwanathan, when he shifted from Calcutta to Rajasthan, there was virtually no TU movement in Rajasthan. The movement was confined to Beawar, Jodhpur and Pali, with the state TUC office in Pali, led by Mohan Poonamiya.

After the split, when Poonamiya went out to CITU, and then formed his own separate RCITU, Vishwanathan got busy reorganising the AITUC movement. He organised Khetri Copper workers' union. He organised the TU movement and organisations in Jaipur. He became a prominent leader of Roadways workers. He became the general secretary of State AITUC, and was on the General Council of the AITUC.

Vishwanathan is well-known for his legal expertise in labour and industrial conflicts. He is self-educated person with hardly any formal education. Yet he knows at least six languages including English and Bengali very well. He is a voracious reader, with a wide range of interest.