

Amal Dutta, General Secretary, Electro-Steel Mazdoor Union at Kharda, Bengal, Calcutta

Name	Amal Dutta, General Secretary, Electro-Steel Mazdoor Union at Kharda, Bengal, Calcutta
Date of Interview	February 9, 2003
Place	Calcutta
Context	Amal Dutta is no more active at state level. He works at his own pace and is involved in organising the unorganised workers at Rahara and Kharda and brings out a newspaper at his own expense for the workers.
Interviewers	Krishna Jha

Biographical Sketches

I was born on 15 April, 1935 in Sylhet now in Bangladesh. I gave up studies after linguistic reorganisation movement was launched in late fifties. I was science student but in 1964 I graduated as arts student. I was deeply influenced by Gopal Banerjee, a famous left leader in Bengal.

I live at Rahara in Kharda district which is dominated by refugees from Bangladesh. I was keen to join labour movement since beginning and had become active in Titagarh Paper mills when I was undergraduate student. I had originally wanted to go to coal fields but was stopped to complete my studies.

I am basically from Sylhet where a referendum was held for joining India at the time of partition. I was asked by the local Congressmen to prepare the voters' list though I was only 13 then. However Sylhet chose to go to Pakistan. It was my first political activity.

Later in India, after completing my studies I was to work in tramways union for some time. Those days almost all students were involved in the movement for nationalisation of the tram company. We had opposed the increase in the fare too of one paisa. The agitation continued for months.

Simultaneously, I joined Bharatiya Iron and Steel Workers' Union at Kharda which was later renamed as Calcutta Electric and Steel company. I am also involved in Aryan's Engineering Workers' Union and Dalmiya Iron and Steel Mazdoor Union.

There was one interesting incident that took place in 1958-59. The management of Dalmiya Steel and Iron Company decided that the holiday for the Holi would be separately fixed for Biharis and Bengalis and would be converted into a restricted holiday. It was an attempt to divide the workers according to their religion and region. The workers stood up against it and call for strike was given. Not less than 1800 workers joined the strike and there was "Bundh" call given by Kharda residents that continued for five days.

There was a massive strike in 1960 too though there is no public sector union at Kharda. A bundh of five days was observed.

There was Food Movement too in 1959. I was arrested even before the movement was launched. On 17 and 18 August, 81 persons were killed in police firing.

In 1967, there was second Food Movement for Kerosene, rice etc. Railway station at Kharda was picketed and no trains were allowed to run. This time too more than 100 persons died.

In 1954-55, there were 7000 jute workers. At Kharda Jute Mill the workers attacked the owner called Justine who exploited them extremely. Justine was finally killed by the agitating workers. He was actually thrown in the boiler.

I also organised the tribals and started teaching their children in their own language, Oraon. I live at Rahara in Kharda district and work in trade union.

Transcript Summary

Context: Amal Dutta is no more active at state level. He works at his own pace and is involved in organising the unorganised workers at Rahara and Kharda and brings out a newspaper at his own expense for the workers.

Amal Dutta was born on 15 April, 1935. He gave up studies after linguistic reorganisation movement was launched in late fifties but resumed and graduated in 1964. He was brought into the movement by Gopal Banerjee, a famous left leader in Bengal.

He lives in Kharda which is dominated by refugees from Bangladesh. He was keen to join labour movement since beginning and had become active in Titagarh Paper mills when he was undergraduate student. He had originally wanted to go to coal fields but was stopped to complete his studies.

Amal Dutta is basically from Sylhet where a referendum was held for joining India at the time of partition. He was asked by the local Congressmen to work. However Sylhet chose to go to Pakistan. It was his first political activity.

Later in India, after completing his studies he was to work in tramways union for some time. Those days almost all students were involved in the movement for nationalisation of the tram company. They had opposed the increase in the fare too of one paisa. The agitation continued for months.

Simultaneously, Amal joined Bharatiya Iron and Steel Workers' Union at Khurda which was later renamed as Calcutta Electric and Steel company. He is also involved in Aryan's Engineering Workers' Union and Dalmiya Iron and Steel Mazdoor Union.

There was one interesting incident narrated by Amal. In 1958-59, the management of Dalmiya Steel and Iron Company decided that the holiday for the Holi would be separately fixed for Biharis and Bengalis and would be converted into a restricted holiday. It was an attempt to divide the workers according to their religion and region. The workers stood up against it and call for strike was given. Not less than 1800 workers joined the strike and there was "Bundh" call given by Kharda residents that continued for five days.

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In 1967, there was second Food Movement for Kerosene, rice etc. Railway station at Kharda was picketed and no trains were allowed to run. This time too more than 100 persons died.

In 1954-55, there were 7000 jute workers. At Kharda Jute Mill the workers attacked the owner called Justine who exploited them extremely. Justine was finally killed by the agitating workers. He was actually thrown in the boiler. Amal also organised the tribals and started teaching their children in their own language, Oraon. Amal resides in Rahara in Kharda district and is still active in trade union.