

Name: Arondekar :

Native Place: - Dhamapur, Malvan

Wages: Starting Wage Rs.5/- as a learner, daily. Later Rs.35/- to Rs.40/- per month in the year 1940. They could get an advance of salary on the 25th of each month or grains. On retirement his salary was Rs.950/- to Rs.1,000/- p.m.

History: He was born in 1928 in a mill worker's family. His father was employed with Swan Mills. He grew up in Bhandari Chawl in Sewri,. Due to an illness and unsatisfactory financial position of his family, he couldn't complete his Matriculation. He took up a job in Swan Mill as Attendance Clerk. He went on to become the Assistant Timekeeper and finally retired as the Timekeeper. Though he never participated in any textile struggle, he sympathizes with the Communist movement.

Arondekar:

' I was born in 1928. I retired as Timekeeper in Swan Mills. My father was a jobber in the same mill. I studied upto matriculation and then I fell ill so I could not write my exam. There was a vacancy in the mill for an attendance clerk so my father recommended me and I got the job. Later I was promoted to Assistant Timekeeper and then Timekeeper. I lived in Bhandari chawl opposite the mill. Now the chawl is gone and a new building has come up in its place.

In my father's days there was only one leader, Dange.

Dange could have got a good government job, and led a secure life, but he chose to work for the welfare of textile workers. Workers loved him. They would fondly refer to him as 'Amcho Dango' (Our Dange, in Malvani, a dialect in Konkan). Then came Datta Samant. He became famous because of the Godrej case. He went to jail for that.

Workers felt that here was a man who could force the owners to listen.

Earlier our mill was doing very well. There was a period of lull in 1968 to 73. Then it picked up again. The new manager brought new machines and but workers were not retrenched, in fact the number of workers increased. In those days if there was modernisation, and workers were retrenched, other workers were recruited. So there was a balance maintained although there was retrenchment. This was true of all the mills, so the total number of workers did not decrease.

The workers put all their might behind the strike. If Datta Samant had withdrawn the strike in time, the workers would not have been ruined. They sold their tenements. There

were some who had to sell their kerosene stoves for 4-5 rupees, and they would subsist on tea they made by heating water with old newspaper. This was the situation all over Girangaon. If one month's salary didn't come in, the worker's family could not sustain itself, and here they had to last out a whole year, even more. The union did distribute grain, but how many times and how long would it last? So the workers started to look for jobs, and soon they were forced to go back to work. In the old days even when there was a strike, the ration shops inside the mills would be open. Now there was no such option.

Now in all the mills the weaving departments are closed, and weaving is done outside in the small powerloom units. Only spinning gets done. These small units they pay the workers half the salary of a mill worker and they work a 12 hour shift. So they make profit that way. The mills are closing. Datta Samant should have understood this situation and taken the right decision.

It happened that at the time that the strike was going on the Congress was involved in its survival and internal politics. The mill workers and the strike became caught up in these events, and the Congress government would not settle. Antulay had to resign soon after the strike began, and Babasaheb Bhonsle became the Chief Minister. Indira Gandhi refused to allow him to settle the strike. The mill owners and the Congress government reached their own understanding. The Indira Gandhi government did not care about what happened to workers. They let them starve into submission.

For the first six months no one entered the mill. Even those who stayed in front of the mill. Workers did not allow us, the staff to enter the mill. We that is the staff of Swan Mills were taken to work after that by the RMMS under police protection. The RMMS would fill police vans with workers and send them inside the different mills. Those who were taken inside would stay inside the mills for a week at a time. Food and everything they needed was provided by the management. Everything was free. They would sleep inside the mill and then in the morning they would work- not work on the machines, there was hardly any production as such. They would clean the machines and the departments.. The workers were often not from the mill. They were brought in from outside. This went on for about six months. After that the workers of the mill started coming back to work. These workers would be beaten up by those who were still on strike. The striking workers said- we all went on strike together, If we go back, it should be together. Don't snatch the livelihood of our children. There were a lot of clashes. There was nothing that could be done. The workers who were going back to work, they were doing it because they had no choice. They were starving.