

National Labour Institute research project

Ref no. : **Cassette no.15**

Name	Sitaram Hadkar
Gender	Male
Age	48
Education	SSC
Professional courses	Tailoring course
Religion	Hindu
Caste	
Profession	Mill worker (Elphinstone Mill)
Address	B-3/165, Shroffwadi, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel-400 013
Father's profession	Mill worker (Elphinstone Mill)
Mother's profession	House wife and farming
Place of birth	Kolhapur
Spouse	Rohini Hadkar (House Wife)

Siblings

Name	Age	Profession
Prakash	30	Service
Pushpa	40	House wife
Rajni	35	House wife

Children

Name	Age	Education	Profession
Manish	18	HSC	
Meenakshi	16	SSC	
Prema	13	School	

Political affiliation/sympathy:

Pre textile strike (1970 to 1982): none
During Strike Datta Samant's Union
Post textile strike (1983 to 1990's): Datta Samant's union

Interview with Sitaram Hadkar

What is your name ?

Sitaram Dhondur Hadkar.

When did you start working in the mills?

In the year 1972

How did you get the job?

My father was a mill worker.

In Elphinstone mills?

Yes in Elphinstone mills.

Where were you born?

In the Hanumante district of Kolhapur in Gargoti .

When did you come to Mumbai.

In the 1969.

What was your age then?

I was 17-18 years then.

What about your education?

I studied there till fourth, but because the financial situation in my house was not very good, I had to work .My father was a badli worker here , after coming here I thought of continuing my studies. So I joined night school and studied till std.8.

But the family needed extra income, so I had to leave my school. After that I sat again privately for SSC, but I had to do the house work and then the mill work also. So I did not get enough time to study. I failed in my exams, and then I worked and got married so I finally forgot about studing.

So for 4 years you studied while working in the mill?

Yes .

Then what did you start as?

As an apprentice. I told my father- give me some work in the folding dept. People were taken in on influence-at that time it was permitted. I told my father then that we are not rich so I should work. I got my certificates and got them registered with the mill. Then I got the call at first from Ruby Mills and then again from Elphinstone mills.

How long were you employed at the time of the 1982 strike?

I had been employed for 10-11 years then.

Do you remember any strikes before 1982?

Yes, in the year 1972 I remember the Dange's strike.

Did you participate?

Yes.

Were you interested in participating in strikes?

Yes because at that time the condition of the workers was such. I myself had experienced it in my house since my father was a just a badli worker. The money was not enough then- how to manage the house- this was the question was on my mind. My father is in a mill so that is why the house could not be managed. Our earnings are low and our expenses more than our earnings-. So if we were to get something more I had to fight so I participated.

So your mother was at the village?

Yes my mother was always at the village.

So how come you were politically conscious? Did you go to any meetings , listen to speeches or did you have friends who were active?

No, none of my friends were in politics neither was I affiliated. I just went there to see how could the financial position of my house could be improve. I went for Dange's meetings. I liked his language, his speeches, his selflessness that people should get something; then I went for George Fernandes' meetings. Then I went to Samant's meetings. At that time the strike was not called. At Shivaji Park the Congress had destroyed their stage. I was there at that time and I really felt that there are some leaders who really fight for the cause of the public. But there was no government to solve the problems of the people. I thought that helping the leaders would make a difference and so I used to go. I came to know Samant and at that time I really liked his personality. He might have been not very good as a person, but he could feel the problems of the poor. He was the one leader who could put forth the problem right before the Delhi government, to Maharashtra government. I started liking him as a dynamic leader. After that I used to keep in touch with him. Then came 1982 and the workers went on strike.

Why did they go on a strike?

The strike was very militant. The opposition, the capitalists, the ruling party would quake at the mention of Datta Samant. I attended almost all the meetings of Dr. Samant. The Shiv Sena had closed down 8 mills for a bonus strike at that time. There was a meeting of the mill representatives at Dr Samant's house. Then Dr Samant suggested- let only these 8 mills be on strike and let the rest work. He felt that the workers of the rest of the mills could then support the striking workers of the 8 mills. Some compensation would be provided so at least they can manage their houses. The idea was to escalate the strike, if there was no change in the attitude of the government. But what happened was that the workers of those 8 mills were agitated, and they came to Doctor and said- we have been on strike for last 6 months; we are hungry and our problem is not getting solved. Unless all the workers participate, we cannot win. They said- we have limited resources, so how many days more can we manage? This was the question put forth in front of Doctor at that time. Data Samant wanted time to lobby with the political parties, the ruling as well as opposition, to see if they would help us. He wanted to rope in people like Dange, who were a good leaders. That is why he did not want to act in haste. So on 17-18 January only a day before the strike, at Sadanand Dhavan park there was a meeting in which the workers brought pressure on Dr Samant that the strike should commence right from tomorrow itself. Doctor was against it but the people had decided. In spite of being close to Doctor, we didn't know that the strike was to start the next day. We went the next day to the mill but the people were standing outside and they refused to let us in. The workers called for a strike and Doctor was forced to take up the leadership.

But then the issue was more than just the bonus?

Yes, workers wanted more than just bonus.

Then what was now the main issue?

The main issue now was to scrap the BIR Act. That union recognition should be through elections -this was Doctor's first demand and then there was demand for a wage hike of 150-250 rupees in basic. So if we asked for Rs. 500 then there would be settlement. Then there was the issue of the badli workers to be made permanent. With these three questions Dr Samant entered into the strike. There were political reasons why some people backed off from their support to Samant. Then Samant was wondering how the strike should be called off. He was taking meetings with the representatives to find a way. He could see that people were suffering but he

had gone so far that there was no way of going back or surrendering. Then under the Presidentship of Bhaurao Patil who was the leader of Indira Congress when Bhau Bhosle was the chief minister, a committee was appointed. We some representatives were taken to that committee. At that time Datta Samant told Bhaurao now that a committee is appointed under your leadership, and you too are from Maharashtra, you know their problems; if you manage to give us an increment of Rs 150-200 then I am willing to take back the strike. This was what Datta Samant discussed with Bhaurao Patil in front of us. Bhaurao said that mill owners were willing to increase about Rs100 and Doctor agreed. He was told not to announce it yet. The people were starving and Doctor wanted them to go back to work. But these discussions went on and Bhaurao's committee was scrapped when Vasantdada became the Chief Minister. Then Datta Samant contested the elections and became a member of the Legislative Assembly. Then the United Front government came into power, which supported Doctor. Even they looked into the matter. I don't deny that the strike was dragged on for too long. The workers remained without any salary for 5-7 months; and these were textile workers who got their salaries on the 10th and would once again have to ask for loans on 11th (there was not enough money). The rulers gave assurances to the people that they would be employed back and you would be made permanent, you would not have to face any problem. The opposition party was taking help from the police. As we did not belong to their party (we belonged to the Datta Samant party) so we were a little hesitant (about these promises). Even we thought that the workers should go back to work. After all how could you expect them to starve- they knew their own situation better than the politicians who could say anything since they were not affected. The workers who went out of job faced a very bad situation.

After that the union went to the court but nothing could be achieved because in the BIR Act there is a clause that if the union applied for recognition then that union should not go on strike. So even if you enjoyed a full majority as Doctor had, he had gone on strike then there could be no question of recognition. And so the strike went on. The cases are going on in the court of law but you know that in court if the judgment is favorable to the worker then the management goes to the higher courts. And then once the case goes in the higher court, it would take a long time. In the meantime some die, some fight, some lose. I don't say that the court doesn't do justice but it takes a lot of time and in the mean time most of the houses are devastated so there is no use in winning any more. That is why Doctor used to say that there was no use going to the courts.

What happened in your mill?

In my mill I never became a member of any committee. I asked them not to take me in the committee as I had a very indecisive mind. I said- I shall talk and be with you but not in the committee. I knew that if I get into these activities when my family doesn't have any other support, there would be a problem. Then everybody said- no, we are with you and so I got into it. But even being in the committee, and close to Doctor, we did not know that the strike was to begin on 18th Jan. We left the house and we went to work as usual. There were people standing outside refusing to let anybody in, so because of the pressure we had to stay out.

But afterwards some workers went to work, because they needed to earn; their financial condition was such. But the management refused to take anybody saying that the mills are closed, why did you come, once when the mill start we will send you a letter. So the people waited, but the letters never came. No one thought about the thousands of workers who lost their jobs. Most of them were removed and there were new recruitments. Few of them went to the court.

Did any body beat up Sangh's (INTUC) people to keep the strike going?

No not in our mill. Some where in the papers we read that it had happened in and under such circumstances. Nobody was beaten up in our mill. In fact we opposed violence because it does not help to solve the problem. But not all workers were same everywhere, some thought that this would solve our problem and so they used some violence. But nothing serious really happened.

But we heard that the Sangh's people or the management had managed to get workers back on machines?

Yes they would hire trucks, call people to work and take them to the Sangh's office. About 10-15 trucks would be filled with 4 police vans at the front and the back and give them protection as if it was for some politician or a VIP. The first management to start this was Century mills and then Bombay Dyeing Mills. Thus some people went. If the person next to me went then another one thought that even I should go. Thus the first major strike break was due to RMMS and the govt itself. If the workers were willing to go on their own will then even Dr Samant would have asked them to do so. But the strike was called off in such a way that the workers lost their jobs. They were removed and no inquiry was held. If the strike would have done any good to the workers then we could have overlooked this, but not till date. How much did you compensate the workers only Rs 60,000-70,000? It was just a days expense for a rich man. We were paid Rs70,000 to run our family, how is he expected to do that? When you employ you should consider the entire life of the worker. Which wasn't the case and it was wrong. The entire ruling party did not consider

it. If the entire industry and the land is sold then will the worker, be it Marathi or Muslim, will he be able to stay in Mumbai? This entire plan was to eradicate poor people from the city. The govt started Garibi Hatao movement so they eradicated poor people to eradicate the poverty.

Before the strike were you in Dange's union ?

Though I approved of his principles I was not in the union.

Did the workers oppose to the offer made by BabaSaheb Bhosle to Datta Samant?

That there was an offer was not told to us. We were told that the Govt is ready for a pay rise of say Rs30-35. They did not want to discuss it with the leader of the longest strike in history, which was recorded in the Guinness Book of world records. So if you offer a solution, then it becomes necessary to talk to the leader- it is a matter of prestige. So even Doctor said that this is just an offer that I read in the paper but govt has not talked about it. It would have been better if the pay rise offer of Rs30-35 was discussed with Doctor because even he was tired and was going to take back the strike. Yes, if it was discussed then Dotor would have laid conditions that the all the workers should be taken back and no legal action should be taken against them. This is the reason why it was not accepted. But when the govt declared this in the newspaper, many workers started going back to work.

But the strike went for 6 months at least. How did the workers sustain themselves?

Doctor had already said that the strike would go on for 6 months and if you are willing only then should we go on strike. People took some small jobs so that daily expenses would be met. Some went to the villages. I went to village for some days. I used to come in between my brother and my father. They were at the village and as such I had a little land in the village. Most went to their villages.

Do you remember any incidents during the strike?

Yes at that time one incident was involving Sharad Pawar. He was a big leader so it was decided to arrange a meeting with him. He had some minister with him. So at Tilak nagar a meeting was called. Here, we put the issues of the strike before him and told him that it is a matter of Maharashtra's prestige as most workers were Marathis or Hindus. Sharad Pawar agreed but he made a condition that we had to leave Samant's organisation and join him. People were not ready to believe and join him. The strike was in full swing so we approached Madhu Dandawate the railway minister instead. He was also in the central government We 10-15 of us went and asked

him to bring up this matter in the central issue (in parliament). His response was hopeful but no results were seen.

What was the main mistake in the strike?

The mistake was the strike itself.

So there should have been no strike?

No, there should have been a planned one as Doctor had suggested. That first we should get the union recognized so that 100% employment would be assured. But due to pressure of the workers even Doctor could not resist. It was the right time too as the workers in other industries were paid well compared to textile mill workers who were paid very much less. So when Doctor got a good wage hike in Empire mills, the workers thought- if he can get such a big hike in a processing unit then as manufacturing workers we can expect more.

If the situation of workers was so bad then why did the union always refuse to withdraw the strike?

This one was prolonged for so long, that it became very difficult for Doctor to withdraw. The govt was not ready to talk about doing away with the BIR Act, and the demands were not met. So even though they knew the plight of the people the govt remained passive. As some workers started working, after a gap of 6 months it had become a matter of prestige.

Did you go back?

Yes I went. I went after 6 months but the labour officer told me that I would not be taken back. I had to wait for my name to appear on the list. He knew us as we went with issues regarding the strike. The security was so tight that we were not let in. We tried till 1993, and we went to the court with the help of Doctor and a few lawyers from Shramik like Kulkarni, but they did not take me back and many others too were in the same position

What is the main difference between the Girangaon of then and now?

The work force prior to 1982 was about 2,00,000 has now become 75000 . The workers have gone to their villages. And now most of them are into various industries and occupations. The choosing of the representative (union or leader) was more important earlier than now. Earlier workers were in large enough in number and they were willing to fight but now the problems are more intense, but no body (no leader) is willing to fight. They are willing to take whatever is

given to them. The main cause is capitalism. The aim of government and the RMMS was to break the strike. The strike could have been a success. The Shiv Sena did not support the 8 mills in which it had a union, so the workers went to Samant. As in the BIR Act, once signed could not be changed the workers were agitated and they thought an influential leader like Datta Samant would help us

Did the Shiv Sena help during actual strike?

No till date they have refused to support any cause related to Dr Samant. They have always blamed him; they have never encouraged him

What did the workers do once they knew they would not get their jobs back?

They made some other arrangements (to work or find work). I went and got some work through my contacts- some work of security (chowkidar) or plumbing jobs, as a helper etc as an unskilled labour. I could not get any other work. This is still going on. As far as others are concerned, there were some people who depended on the strike and some who found work somewhere else. But there were many who were either low educated or not at (educated) all who depended on the strike to bring them their rights.

What loss did you suffer?

No loss as such- only I made less money than before- where I earned 800 before, now I get 400. The management of the domestic expenses became a little difficult. But because I had no bad habits or vices, it was not a very big problem. All I wanted was two meals and a few clothes. Relatives helped us.

What do the workers taking VRS do afterwards?

They got very little compensation- about Rs 70000 out of which they would owe Rs 80000. Thus they repaid their loans. So they couldn't save anything. If they could at least get 1, 00, 000 or more it may be different. That money was not enough. If it was a little bit more then they could have done something to make a new life. Then things would have been different.