

## **Sowdavaram Sankarayya**

A short biographical note on Sowdavaram Sankarayya, President, Grey Berytes Minig Corporation Employees Union, interviewed at Mangalapeth, Obulavarapanali Mandal, Kadapa on September 26, 2004

Sowdavaram Sankarayya was born on August 6, 1953 at Mangalpeth. His father was an agricultural labour and had only two acres of land. He worked on his own land as well as others' and yet lived in hardship.


Sankarayya studied hard and got engineering certificate from ITI. He also got medical practitioner's certificate and became a practitioner as he did not want to serve any organisation on wages. Sankarayya was pained to see the private organisations exploiting the workers on less wages. He was offered job in the mines which he refused and started trade union activities among the workers.

At this time Sankarayya came in touch with the party comrades like Subbanna, Srinivas Redy, C Krishnamurthy and many others who guided him in his work. In 1974, the male workers at the mines got only 580 and female workers 480 per month. There were no facilities like bonus, accident care etc.

Sankarayya was a medical practitioner in the area and helped the workers in all the factories unofficially. He came in close touch with the workers and their suffering. The mines were started in the area displacing villages several times and the compensation was never enough. Thousand families had been shifted and split into two while getting rehabilitated. They were given only land for land and no financial help, hence building of houses and scarcity of employment hit the farmers living in the area. For infrastructure, Rs 75 lakh was spent but for the villagers, there was no fund.

From these villages came the contract and regular workers. Sankarayya started his union activities though there was already an organisation for workers led by Raja Reddy but afraid of management. The organisation was started with only ten workers and they had their meeting in the night only in the beginning.

Sankarayya soon initiated struggle for wage hike, bonus and other demands and show cause notice was served to the workers. Demand charter was given to the management. At this time assistant Labour Commissioner visited the mines. But he was also unable to take any steps. On October 12, 1979, Sankarayya launched hunger strike with another worker for ten days for holidays, regularisation of workers, bonus, maternity leave for women. Finally Sankarayya was taken to the hospital where State Mines Minister came to visit him and agreed on the demands and got them implemented. This agreement was the first stepping stone for the union. The non-regular workers are paid today Rs 190 though management is still reluctant to regularise them.



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