

## **R. CHAKRAPANI (Tamilnadu)**

### Bionote

Born on 24 April 1924, he is one of the pioneers of handloom workers' movement in Tamilnadu, particularly in Trichy.

His father was in cigar business and was also a handloom weaver. Died early. His mother had to carry the family by selling vegetables

Chakrapani's TU life started early when he established Handloom Workers' Union in Trichy way back in 1946. The workers used to get only Rs 2 Annas 14/- for 27 yards of saree weaving. Later on they were able to get it increased through successive agitations. He organised more than 6000 workers in the Varayur area under the leadership of AS Krishnamoorthy, the famous TU leader of those times. There were several struggles and agitations. Half of these workers were women.

It was in 1946 that the Handloom Federation and the workers' movement decided to establish workers' cooperatives. Incidentally, it was the famous Communist leader PC Joshi who gave a call to form coops to face the industrialists. Previously, the coops were caste-based only; now they included all the castes and sections, in fact all the workers. A Handloom Weavers' Society was formed on 7 November 1947, the day of anniversary of the Russian revolution. It spread all over.

**R. Chakrapani (Tamilnadu)**

Transcriptive Note

(He gave interview in the CPI office in Trichy on 18 March 2005 during the day-time. He was eagerly looking forward to the interview, fixed beforehand, and was ready with his answers. The interview proceeded without any problem as he was clear in his ideas as well as language. He was assisted by his colleague, Sh. P.S. Balasundaram, who supplied some important details. — Krishna Jha, Anil Rajimwale.)

I am 78 years old, born on 24 April 1926. My father was in cigar business; he at the same time was a weaver. But he died when I was only 1-1/2 years old. My mother, as a result, had to look after the family, and she had to sell vegetables to feed us.

I am not much educated. I came into this industry as soon as it was possible. I began working as an ordinary worker. Soon I was in the thick of the handloom workers' movement. I was one of those who established the Handloom Workers' Union in Trichy in 1945. It was affiliated to the AITUC. Krishnamoorthy was the main figure behind all this. There were 6000 workers in Varayur area of the town. They used to get only Rs 2/- 14/- annas as wages per 27 yards of weaving of saris. There were several struggles and agitations for wage increase. The wages got doubled after some time due to the struggles. Women, constituting half of the workforce, played memorable role in them.

The workers' federation decided in 1946 to set up handloom cooperatives. Earlier, there were only societies based upon castes. e.g. of Devanga community. It was the AITUC union which formed cooperative inclusive of all the castes. P.S. Balasundaram was the president of the coop society in 1947.

One of the important methods of the strikes was seizing of the shuttles by the union. That ensured the success of the strikes. They used to be kept in secret places; it was one of those places that I was arrested from.

Trichy Conspiracy Case was instituted in 1949-50. Many people were arrested including about 100 ordinary workers; I was one of them.

We could get a number of demands conceded and several improvements done in the living standard of the workers. We got housing, bonus, children's birth certificates, clothes for Dipavali, maternity benefits, education allowance for the children, etc. All due to the coop movement.

I had been municipal commissioner for 5 terms in 1959-99. At present looking after a big weavers' cooperative.

XXXXXXXX