

## **M.M. Gope, Delhi**

### Birth and Early Background:

Was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1930 in Chilimi village of Aurangabad zilla in Bihar. His father was an agricultural labourer who was virtually a bonded labourer for the landlord. At the age of six Gope was a witness to the beatings by his landlord which resulted later in the death of his father. Thus his father died due to beatings by the landlord. After that Gope had run away many times to his uncles and others just to escape this fate of becoming another bonded labourer like his father. Finally in the process of these escapes he landed up in Delhi in 1946 and started working in the then New Delhi's Carlton Café and later worked in the Military Officers Mess at Princes Park in 1947. In 1948 he joined the now big chain i.e. the Nirulas. In 8<sup>th</sup> August 1949 Gope along with many others was involved in leading and organising his first strike at Nirulas. From then on began Gope's life of working as a TU leader.

### Trade Union life:

The unique thing about M.M. Gope is that over the years from the time in 1948 when he worked in Nirulas, Gaylord and other places from where he was dismissed due to his union activities he developed over the decades into the unchallenged and much respected leader of the hotel workers in Delhi and then at the all India level for first the ITDC hotels and later even many private hotels.

In 1951 he created the Hotel Workers Union of which he was Gen-Sec. and created an all-India membership for the union. From then on he expanded this union membership covering all the restaurants in those days in Delhi like Nirulas, Wengers, Gaylord, Hotel Suisse, Oberoi's, Hotel Meera Behn (now called Khyber), Marina Hotel, Hotel Ambassador, and later on in the ITDC chain of hotels. Indeed it is no mean achievement for a man from an agricultural labourer family whose father and he who had to work virtually as bonded labourers later after coming to Delhi by chance to rise to becoming the all-India General Secretary of ITDC Union and other unions. Gope of course associated his rise in the TU movement to being a member of the Communist Party. For he says such stories of people rising from very poor backgrounds and rising high is possible only in the communist party where nobody cares about what a person's background is.

Gope Saheb as he is affectionately called in the course of over 5 decades had managed through various strikes in the 60s and 70s managed to develop an agreement with ITDC and all these other older hotels and restaurants of Delhi whereby proper Wage Boards were established for the employees of ITDC hotels whereby now they are the best paid hotel workers. In fact they are virtually considered at par with Central Govt. employees and get all those benefits. In fact from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1997 under the 5<sup>th</sup> Pay Commission the ITDC employees are going to get pay at par with Central Govt. employees. Now Gope

Saheb is in the process of negotiating similar conditions for private hotels that were newly constructed in the 80s like the Hyatt, Mauryas, Taj group, Meridian, Raddisson, Hilton etc. In these hotels the conditions of employees is very bad- they can be kicked out any moment from their jobs, their pay is much less than in the unionised hotels. If at all there are some unions in these hotels it is a management propped union that agrees to whatever they say and don't fight for the workers rights. So Gope 'Saheb' as he is affectionately called has the distinction of being definitely one of those who unionised the hotel workers in Delhi and the whole ITDC chain all over India. In the hotel industry his role is historical.