

Interview Summary & Biographical Sketch

Name:- Krishna Modi Iron Ore Mines, Coal Mines, Beedi, etc. SKMS, AITUC.

Date:- June 15th 2003, & June 16th 2003.

Time:- On 15th June- 6.15am to 8.30 am - Tape no. 1

On 15th June- 8.05am to 11.25 am- Tape no. 2

On 16th June- 11.15 pm to 0.15 am- Tape no. 3 - side A

Venue:- Shakir Sadan, Bhopal.

Interviewer:- Bobby Poulouse

Context:- Krishna Modi is a 'Gandhian communist' who wears a Nehru cap. Perhaps it a legacy of his days in Congress during the Quit India movement and in Congress Socialist Party.

Interview Summary

He began by saying that he was born on 5th July 1930 in Balaghat, MP. His father worked as 'mazdoori'. He had a small general store and it was while he used to sit there that he used to hear one Tiwari who used to talk of national politics and through that he was then in fifth class. He used to follow the big leaders of Balaghat and demonstrations and joined them in 'individual satyagraha'. Then he joined the Quit India movement and in those days his initial political guru was one comrade Amar Singh Rathod. Krishna Modi had to leave town i.e. Warsonie (Balaghat dist.) for eight months due to his involvement in the Quit India movement. So Krishna Modi is a freedom fighter. After 1942 when he was in class 6 he couldn't do studies, which he later did by correspondence- school, BA, MA, and LLB. He said he is a self-taught man. Then he started work at the Manganese ore mines near Balaghat in 1950s. In those days there were mines all owned by private companies one was a British one. They also started work in the coal mines in Dalli Rajhara mines. The conditions Krishna Modi said were so pathetic and the mine workers were all from outside and lived a life like bonded labour. They could not even get out from their hutments which were surrounded by barbed wire. He said they would get no cash here during work. They would purchase things from all those stores, be it food etc from shops sub-contracted by the owner of the mine. Their purchases were minused from their total amount which they would get when their contract ends after a year and they return to the contractor who hired them in their home town. There they would get the money after deducting their purchases. So it was according to Krishna Modi a life of hell. Rajhara mines those days had about 6000 mine workers. The dolomite mines of Nandini had about 2000 mine workers, the Hiri Mines had about 1000 mine workers. Because of their union's activities which were having an impact they got good response and in one day in those days they used to make a membership of nearly 3000. Workers were joining SKMS as they heard about how it was successfully get some benefits and wage increases for the workers. In Hiri mines a worker died due to negligence and accident so it gave a chance for SKMS to enter and they mobilized them and launched an agitation which was successful in getting something for the family. Membership and unit was so formed in Hiri Mines. In 1960 they formed the Koyala Khadan Mazdoor Sangh and started working in the Korba coal mines. The union is running even today. They launched many successful struggles in the coal mines and the combined effect of all this was

that in 1967 the govt. announced a Coal Wage Board and since then and in 1970s after the nationalization of the coal industry things started to improve for the coal workers in terms of wage and social security. In 1964 Krishna Modi said he left Korba and joined as Supervisor the MP electricity board. But he was dismissed little later so he joined NMDC mines as a muster roll worker in Pathekheda. Then he narrated about all the positions he held in AITUC in MP i.e. President MP state AITUC, Pr. Indian Mine Workers Federation (IMWF), then SKMS Pr. Krishna Modi said consistent work has paid off and today they are the recognized union in all major mines in Chattisgarh. In BALCO though INTUC is the recognized union but AITUC is the main union among contract workers. Then finally he narrated about the historic Bailadila struggle of five years in which he was also involved to stop the sale of 11 B and all the NMDC mines to Mittals. He said prior to the unionisation of the mines from 1950s there were no social security for the mine workers and extremely bad wages. He said it was only struggle that gave the workers dignity and some decent wage and some social security. However he said globalization is going to take all this away if workers don't struggle. One of the other historic achievements Krishna Modi said happend due to struggles in the unorganized sector from the 1950s and 60s was the Govt was forced to formulate the Minimum Wage Act in 1967 and once this was accepted it gave scope for fighting for its implementation. The impact can be seen by the fact that prior to Min Wage Act in 1950s the min. Wage per day was Rs. 1/- but today it is Rs. 607- per day in mines and after struggles wherever there are unions it does get implemented. He said today's minimum wage of a coal worker per month is Rs. 3,3007- plus DA, Bonus, other social security benifits. Thus there has been a geniune rise out of utter exploitation due to nationalisation and away from privatizaiton. From the 1950s till today SKMS (Coal) has been involved in struggling for and forcing the govt. to bring in 6 successive wage revision boards. This he said is truly historic for the poor mine worker who was a slave (literally, not metaphorically) in the 1950s when they had started their work among them. In the manganese ore mines there was a historic 12 day strike in 1956 in whose leadership was Krishna Modi with others. Then there was another historic 22 day strike in Pathakheda coal mines in 1978. The difference is the prior all these struggles a worker in manganese mines used to get 15 annas per day but today he gets Rs. 677- per day. Krishna Modi married a Christian lady and said though he didn't believe in any god yet he allowed her to practice his faith. He said he began his political life,by working among sweepers (harijans) and running their union though he is a high caste (vaisya), But life taught him only one thing i.e. to struggle and he is a man of clear conscience, a-humane innocence, yet very deep in emotions and full of affection. There are truly very ^ew %umane gandhian communists'. Krishna Modi is definately one.

Biographical Sketch

Krishna Modi

Krishna Modi was born on 5th July 1930. He belonged to a mazdoor's family and his father ran a small shop. His initial interest in politics began due to the political talks he used to hear in the shop. Then in his school days he joined Gandhi's 'individual satyagraha' and later the 'Quit India' movement for which he was arrested. Krishna Modi is a freedom fighter. He quit school in the process. Much late in life he self-taught himself and did his school, BA, MA, and LLB all through correspondence. It was really an achievement for a man who had no time in his life for almost anything due to his trade union activities. He started his trade union work in the manganese ore mines near Balaghat. Then he worked in the Dalli Rajharra mines. He would through his trade union work literally have to free mine workers from bonded labour. He organized mine workers in iron ore, coal, dolomite and other mines in Chattisgarh. He was also in the historic Bailadila struggle and in BALCO and Bhilai. He said from the initial days his struggle through SKMS led to formation of the Minimum Wage Committee in MP govern lent which allowed them to force employers to give at least minimum wage in many places.