

Bal Krishna Gupta (AITUC)

A **short biographical note** on Bal Krishna Gupta interviewed on May 26, 2003 by Krishna Jha at Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh). He expired by the end of June, 2003.

I was born in December 1920 in a middle class family of Bhopal. I am not sure about the exact date. After completing my intermediate education at Bhopal, I shifted to Indore and got admission in Christian College there.

During my college days at Indore, I started working with Praja Mandal and participated in civil liberties movements demanding basic political and economic rights. Unemployment was a major issue. Since 1936, when I was active in Praja Mandal, we launched movement on this issue. In 1939, the Nawab of Bhopal in partnership with some British businessman set up a textile mill there, though employed only those who were not from Bhopal. The masses already suffering from acute unemployment and the resultant impoverishment resented the step. We took up the issue and launched a massive movement in Bhopal against Nawab which later spread in the other parts of the estate.

However the Nawab was undeterred and set up another factory in Bhopal. It was a straw mill where the work-load was very high on the workers. We again stepped in and organised strike which lasted for 52 days in 1950.

The Nawab was keen on industrialisation and started a sugar mill, a match factory and an ice factory. In most of these factories the Nawab had his share. I was then working with the Congress, and organised along with other trade union leaders separate unions in all these mills.

In 1948, alongwith Akshay Kumar, Mohini Giri and Shanti Devi, I started a movement for the merger of the estate of Bhopal with the rest of the country. In 1950, Bhopal witnessed a bandh for complete one month. Large scale arrests by the police led to flooding of state prison.

I went underground. Soon I came in contact with the then Home Minister Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and following my underground channel I moved in the state and even addressed the public rallies despite an arrest warrant against me. Finally, Bhopal was merged with India in 1952.

The movement that won merger of Bhopal with India was by and large peaceful and, despite a good section opposing the merger, no communal disharmony in the society could develop though it was a state dominated by the minority community, and country was in the grip of communal riots after partition. Bhopal presented an example of the secular traditions as the riot victims from other parts of the country were sheltered and fed in the communes run by Shakir Ali and me alongwith many others belonging to both the communities. Bhopal witnessed a complete communal harmony and Shalir Ali was given the name as "Shere Bhopal".

Immediately after the merger I left Congress. In 1952 itself, I was invited to Delhi by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru alongwith Shakir Ali. In Delhi, Nehru not only asked us to return to Congress but also told us to prepare a list of candidates who could form the government in the state. Both of us rejected the proposal and on August 15, 1953 formed the Bhopal branch of the Communist Party of India. Thereafter, I remained active both in the party and on the trade union front.

Bal Krishna Gupta (AITUC)

A **short transcriptive note** on Bal Krishna Gupta interviewed on May 26, 2003 by Krishna Jha at Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh). He expired in the first week of June, 2003.

Bal Krishna Gupta was born in December 1920 in a middle class family of Bhopal. He was not sure about the exact date. After completing his intermediate education at Bhopal, he shifted to Indore and got admission in Christian College there.

During his college days at Indore, he started working with Praja Mandal and participated in civil liberties movements demanding basic political and economic rights. Unemployment was a major issue. Since 1936 Praja Mandal with Bal Krishna Gupta as an active member launched movement on this issue. In 1939, the Nawab of Bhopal in partnership with some British businessman set up a textile mill there, though employed only those who were not from the estate. The masses already suffering from acute unemployment and the resultant impoverishment resented the step. Bal Krishna Gupta and few others took up the issue and launched a massive movement in Bhopal against Nawab which later spread in the other parts of the estate.

However the Nawab was undeterred and set up another factory in Bhopal. It was a straw mill where the work-load was very high on the workers. Bal Krishna Gupta again stepped in and organised strike which lasted for 52 days in 1950.

The Nawab was keen on industrialisation and started a sugar mill, a match factory and an ice factory. In most of these factories the Nawab had his share. Bal Krishna Gupta, while working with the Congress, organised along with other trade union leaders separate unions in all these mills.

In 1948, under the leadership of Bal Krishna Gupta, Akshay Kumar, Mohini Giri and Shanti Devi, a movement was launched for the merger of the estate of Bhopal with the rest of the country. In 1950, Bhopal witnessed a bandh for complete one month. Large scale arrests by the police led to flooding of state prison.

Bal Krishna Gupta went underground. Soon he came in contact with the then Home Minister Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and following his underground channel he moved heroically in the state and even addressed the public rally despite an arrest warrant against him. Finally, Bhopal was merged with India in 1952.

The movement that won merger of Bhopal with India was by and large peaceful and, despite a good section opposing the merger, no communal disharmony in the society could develop though it was a state dominated by the minority community, and country was in the grip of communal riots after partition. Bhopal presented an example of the secular traditions as the riot victims from other parts of the country were sheltered and fed in the communes run by Bal Krishna Gupta, Shakir Ali and others belonging to both the communities. Bhopal witnessed a complete communal harmony for which the credit goes to the leaders in the city like Bal Krishna Gupta and Shalir Ali who was later addressed as "Shere Bhopal".

Immediately after the merger Bal Krishna Gupta left Congress. In 1952 itself, he was invited to Delhi by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru alongwith Shakir Ali. In Delhi, Nehru not only asked them to return to Congress but also told them to prepare a list of candidates who could form the government in the state. Both Shakir Ali and Bal Krishna Gupta rejected the proposal and on August 15, 1953 formed the Bhopal branch of the Communist Party of India. Thereafter, Com Gupta remained active both in the party and on the trade union front.