

## **Bio-note**

### **A. Govindasamy (Chennai, Tamil Nadu)**

He is the general secretary of Madras Press Labour Union. He was born on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1921 in an agriculturist's family. The family had only a small piece of land, only 5 acres. He studied upto 9<sup>th</sup> standard.

During 1937-38 he worked in a small journal Oozian as an ordinary employee. Important labour leaders used to visit the place to meet the workers, eg. Jeevanandam, S. V. Ghate, A. S. K. Iyengar, V. Subbaiah, Srinivas Rao and others.

So, Govindasamy was spotted by ASK, who began to assign him various jobs of the unions. Gradually, Govindasamy got into TU activities, generally among various press workers. In the meantime, he began working in another press. When ASK was arrested, that put lot of pressure on others including Govindasamy.

It was a memorable day when Govindasamy got an opportunity to act as a volunteer to receive Subhash Bose. It was Press Labour Union which organised the meetings in his honour.

Govindasamy began full-scale TU work, organizing the ordinary workers, arranging and speaking at gate meetings, etc. He was arrested several times since 1941 and participated in hunger strikes etc. several times inside and outside the jail.

He joined the army at the height of the Second World War, was trained in Jabalpur, Katni etc, and then sent to Burma. But he kept coming in clash with the British officers and was sent back and dismissed from the army. So were 43 others.

He was asked to take up the general secretaryship of the Press Labour Union in 1947.

In the underground days of 1948-49, the TU offices were sealed, and he was banished to his village under observation.

He participated in the anti-American protests when the Rosenberg couple were hanged in the early 1950s, in the US. The demonstrators smashed the American Consulate in Madras.

Govindasamy still takes interest in TU activities even though physically he is no more strong and capable.

## **Transcription Note**

### **A. Govindasamy (Tamil Nadu)**

(The interview was conducted by Anil Rajimwale on 11 March 2003 at 11.45 a.m. in CPI headquarters in Chennai. The place and atmosphere of the interview was very conducive for interview.

The respondent was quite cooperative and willing to give answers. Due to old-age, hearing problem and language difficulties, help of others had to be taken. Therefore, the interview had to be interpreted/translated into English from Tamil)

I was born on 14 November 1921 in a village which was earlier in Andhra but now is part of Tamil Nadu. We were a family of agriculturists but I shifted to Chennai after my 9<sup>th</sup> standard study. Here I used to work in a press, and as such came in contact prominent leaders of the trade union movement and of the Communist Party. For example, leaders like Jeeva, Ghate, ASK, Srinivas Rao and others used to visit the place in connection with their activities. They, particularly ASK used to entrust me with various errands and tid-bit jobs of the union. Gradually, I began to sit in their meetings and even speak in the gate meetings. I gradually got integrated into the Press Labour Union. At that time, there were no labour laws, factory acts, etc and people worked 10-12 hours. Later, I became a prominent leader-activist and even went to jails, particularly as ASK was arrested.

I was one of the volunteers to receive Subhash Chandra Bose in Chennai. That was a memorable day. It was the Press Labour Union which organised the mass meetings where he spoke.

We went through so many struggles and hungerstrikes, many of which I do not even remember. In those times, we used to enter right into the Fort to protest and to put in our demands.

In 1941 railway strike, we went to jail in solidarity. There was hunger strike in front of the Law College.

I joined the army during the war. The Party asked us to. We were trained in various places including Jabalpur and then sent to Burma. I was in the mechanical side. But myself and about 40 odd others used to pick up quarrels with the British officers over food quality, living conditions etc. They used to punish us.

We also used to receive Party journals there in a shop in Rangoon, wherefrom we picked it up. The money was sent as family remittance to India to be paid to the paper.

Soon, we were removed from Burma, sent to India and dismissed from the army.

After the dismissal from the army, I resumed the TU work in 1947 and became the general secretary of the Press Labour Union, a post I hold till date. Party was soon banned and the TU offices sealed. I also worked in train, harbour, motor transport unions etc. I was entered to my village, with policemen on the watch all the time. Then I shifted to Sharaf Ali House, the HQ of the movements.

There was the incident of smashing of the American Consulate when Rosenberg couple were hanged.

We showed black flags to Indira Gandhi when she came to Chennai.

There were big struggles in Christian Literary Society (CLS) and other places. Satish Loomba came in the movement which spread far and wide. He addressed the workers. He, and Mohan Kumaramangalam, then flew back, but it proved to be a flight to death. They died in the air crash.

During the RIN Revolt of 1946, we organised a press workers' strike in Chennai in solidarity.