

A short transcriptive note on

18. Vishwa Nath Mathur, Delhi

I was born on April 11, 1912 in a village in Samastipur district (formerly Darbhanga) of Bihar. My grandfather was a landlaord, though had little land. We were petty cultivators. My father was employed at Betiah estate (Bihar) which he left soon to shift to Banares where my mother's family lived. Father kept changing jobs here while I was admitted in Anglo-Vedic Dayanand High school here.

At school once I was punished and beaten up mercilessly by the principal without any fault. My father took me away from the school. After the incident, I never felt inclined to either go to school or study.

As my mother died when I was very young, father left me at my maternal grandmother's place. She was a religious person and everyday used to bathe in Ganga. I used to be with her when she visited the temples on her way back. At my school, the Arya Samaj was the dominating influence and we were told that idols in temples had nothing to do with the divinity. I used to experiment by pushing the idols down or kicking the place where they were kept though without the knowledge of my granny. I also used to observe the priests and "pandas" how they used to fleece people in the name of rituals.

My father got a job in Gaya and he took us there. He got me admitted in Gaya Model school whioch had a nationalist background. We used to have moming prayers in front of a nationalist tricolour. In the school I got attracted towards nationalist literature and soon became a member of the Hindustani Sewa Dal.

Later I was sent to a boarding school in Vrindavan. Here also my school mates were inspired by nationalist sentiments. Once Gandhiji was to pass through Mathura railway station and we decided to meet him. Our pricipal was strict and did not allow us to go there. We slipped out and walked upto the station. However when we met Gandhiji the only question he asked was whether we had come with the permission of the school authorities.

Later we also performed our own symbolic actions during the Salt Satyagraha of Gandhiji when I returned to Gaya. In this phase I came in touch with Anushilan group in Vrindavan and later with Hidustan Socialist Rpublican Association (HSRA) in Banares. We wanetd to plan armed actions against the British rulers and I started learning to use the firearms. I was also sent to Abohar in Punjab and Bombay to arrange firearms.

Later I came to Gaya where we picketed at the wine shops and burnt foreign clothes. We had our own movement against the ban on singing of Vande Mataram.

Because of my active involvement with the revolutionary activities, I was convicted in Gaya conspiracy case of 1932-33 and was sent to Hazaribagh Central Jail.

In 1934, I was sent to Alipore Central JAiland ultimately Andamans Cellular prison. Here I came in touch with other freedom fighters and was introduced to revolutionary literature. We used to have political classes and discussions and also rebellious activities inside the jail, including hunger strike for long periods. The experiences in Andaman shaped my political understanding and inspired me to work for the cause of working class.

After the Congress government came to power in several British Indian provinces, we were repatriated to the main land.

After returning from the Andaman in 1938-39 to Gaya, I started taking interest in the conditions and struggles of industrial working class and began forming their trade unions. Gaya Cotton Mills was the first such centre where I formed a union. The workers here did not have even drinking water facilities. We launched our agitation and got the union registered and managed a place on rent for our office. I started making speeches for the first time.

I also worked among the workers in stone quarries, loco staff, shop assistants, motor drivers and formed their unions. By this time I was working Jharia, Katras, Dhanbad, Giridih and several other places.

I had also become an active member of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) which helped my work among the industrial workers. I organised workers in cement, paper, sugar and other factories in Dalmianagar (earlier known as Dehri-on-Sone). In one of our agitations, even cavalry was brought to suppress us.

During Second World War, I was arrested again and was released only in 1945. I got back to my trade union work soon after. I was beaten up in one of the meetings with lathis and was badly injured.

I continued my trade union work after independence also. I shifted to Calcutta. By this time I had to take up a job because of financial crisis in the family. But I kept in touch with the working class movement and soon got involved with jute workers problems and movements.

In 1968, I left for England, again due to family reasons. But I continued my involvement with trade union work even there.

After returning to India few years later, I started working for the demands of the freedom fighters all over the country.

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Interviewers: Anil Rajimwale, Krishna Jha,

A short biographical note on

18. Vishwanath Mathur

Vishwanath Mathur was born on April 14, 1912 at a village in Samastipur (earlier in Darbhanga district) in Bihar. He belonged to a family of small farmers. His father was first employed in Batiah estate, then in Banares and later in Gaya.

Mathur was a sensitive child and reacted to his surroundings like religious rituals, faith in god, casteism and exploitation and questioned them. He always rebelled against imposition and was thrown out of school several times. In Gaya and Banares, he faced obscuratism and opposed it in his own way.

Mathur's political views were formed under the influences of the nationalistic as well as revolutionary ideas that were common among his school friends. He was drawn towards Congress Sewa Dal and later towards revolutionary organisations like Anushilan and Hindustan Republican Association (HSRA).

Mathur was convicted in the Gaya Conspiracy case in 1932-33 and was lodged in various jails including Hazaribagh Central jail. Later he was shifted to Alipore Central jail and finally expatriated to Andaman Cellular jail.

Andaman jail was an institution in itself where study circles, debates on political, philosophical issues were organised and concerned literature was obtained. Mathur was also initiated in these activities and his political views were shaped here only. He developed a comprehensive view of the working class and the relevance of its struggles.

After few years when Congress government came to power in some of the British provinces, Mathur was repatriated along with others.

Soon after his return, Mathur started organising the workers in Gaya on his own and his reputation as former Andaman prisoner helped him immensely. He organised the workers at Gaya Cotton Mills, formed a union there and got it registered. He organised rickshaw pullers, shop assistants, drivers, loco staff and also stone quarry workers.

He organised a strike of Gaya Cotton Mill workers in 1938-39. In this period he was a member of the Congress Socialist Party and this fact helped him to organise the workers. In this period, he had organised the drivers of Jharia, Katras, Dhanbad and Giridih where later he worked for sometime. Dalmianagar (formerly known as Dehri-on-Sone) was known as an important industrial centre with cement, sugar, paper and many other factories and Mathur organised workers here reviving many old unions and forming new ones. During Second World War he was arrested for his trade union activities.

After he was released in 1945, Mathur resumed his trade union activities in Gaya from where he shifted to Calcutta and got involved in jute workers movement though he had to take up a job here due to financial constraints.

Mathur had to go to England in 1968 due to family reasons. He maintained contact with British trade union movement as long as he lived there.

Now he is back in Delhi and works for the freedom fighters all over the country.
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