

Ratnakar (Maharashtra)

Ratnakar was born on 11 November 1930 in Korhale in Ahmadnagar district of Maharashtra. He received primary education in his village, later shifting to Ahmadnagar for further studies. His family's condition in the town was not good. He completed Matric in 1947, and I.Sc. in 1949.

In Politics:

Ratnakar was earlier in the RSS, as also some other of his family. He used to go to Shakhas regularly and was a long time in the RSS. He even wanted to join Satyagraha against ban on RSS, but was prevented by his mother.

In the meantime, he began visiting the library of his brother's friend. The library contained books on Marxism, and thus Ratnakar began to be influenced by Marxist ideology. He was attracted by the poor-oriented Marxist movement, and had discussions with RSS leaders but ultimately quit RSS. In the mean time, he worked as a junior division clerk in the court of the Civil Judge. He also worked as a teacher. Then he took law as the subject of study, and became a lawyer.

Contact with TU movement

Ratnakar wanted to work for the poor. It was mainly this idea that brought him into Trade Union movement. He came in contact with beedi workers' movement in 1957, although he was politically already active in the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement of 1956. He began lecturing to and taking classes of the Beedi workers.

Ratnakar became president of Beedi workers Union (Red Flag) Ahmadabad. Later, in 70s, he began to work at state level in Beedi Workers' Federation. All India Beedi, Cigar and Tobacco Workers' Federation was formed in Gondia in 1970. He became its executive member, later its general secretary. He is now the president of the same. He was also on the central advisory board and Beedi workers' welfare fund. The federation became the major organisation of Beedi workers. All India Beedi-Cigar Federation is the biggest in India, and his active in it. At the same time, Ratnakar also became active among non-beedi workers through General workers trade union. He led many a battles for the regularisation of contract labour.

A major chunk, 95%, of the Beedi workers are female. They have fought several struggles and organised strikes dharnas and "Rasta Roko" (Road Blocks). Ratnakar organised and participated in many of them.

As a result of his activities, studies and writings, he has become an authority on Beedi industry. One of his major and unique achievements for the Beedi workers has been building cooperative housing for them. He inspired several such schemes, and Ahmadnagar has few Beedi workers housing colonies on cooperative basis.

He has worked among the Padmashali Telugu Samaj, who are associated with handloom and power-loom industries. Once, when Shankar Dayal Sharma was the President of India, Ratnakar took up the cause of loom workers, Beedi workers, and others, and announced that he was detained as a preventive measure, and released only after the President left.

Ratnakar has been active on the legal front as well. He has taken up legal struggle of the workers successfully. He had been the vice-president of the TUI of Food, Tobacco, Hotel, etc. workers. He also contested the assembly and parliament elections. At present, he is one of the office bearers of all India Beedi workers' Federation.