

## **M.M. Katre, Lal Nishan Party (Leninist), Maharashtra**

Born on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1927, he was educated in Kolhapur and Pune. He came in contact with '42 movement at the age of 15. Through student movement, and school and college friends, he, in particular came in contact with the Satara Patri Sarkar. S.K. Limaye, Yashwant Chawan and come others joined his group. The group came under the influence of Jai Prakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, and others.

### Into Trade Union movement

These persons, including M.M. Katre, and some others formed the famous Navjivan Sangathan (NS), which was later to play a crucial role in the labour field, in formation of Lal Nishan Party, and in other areas.

To cultivate close contact with masses, its members used to work among the labourers. In 1944, about 400 to 500 workers of a Sugar Mill in Kolhapur went on strike. They contacted the volunteers of Navjivan Sangathan, who worked actively among them. This was Katre's first contact with the TU movement.

In Pune there were different kinds of labour movement e.g. defence, sugar, ammunition, MES, etc. In Kolhapur state, there was Dalits' movement. N.S. was banned because of its militancy.

Katre represented the defence workers in all India conference in Delhi, and a call was given for an all India defence workers struggle towards the end of 1946.

He also participated in and organised the struggles of class III and IV employees in 1946, as also the postal workers.

He organised the underground functioning of the Navjivan Sangathan. It had several whole-timers. The N.S. had differences with the communist movement and so remained outside it. Yet Katre and others had to go underground and to the jail of a long time, and was released in July 1952 with Dange and others. In the jail he took lessons from Dange a group separated out from the Congress in 1947. The Navjivan Sangathan dissolved itself and merged with PWP.

Katre was the founder member and General Secretary of the PWD workers union in 1954. PWD, Construction, Irrigation, etc. jobs were mainly done by the agricultural labourers. Therefore, Katre organised them also at their source in the villages. In this case, they would refuse to come to work if not given proper wages, etc.

Katre was the workers representative on the Kalelkar Board, he organised the TUs of the agriculture laborer in Ahmadnagar district agricultural labourer union. His Trade Union considered agriculture too as an industry. Subsequently, got favourable decision from the Supreme Court. Katre fought for their minimum wages, bonus, etc.

During the famine of 1972-74, twenty-five lakh agricultural labourers worked in camps and projects. Lal Nishan led by Katre and others led the agitation for wage increase, creches, wagen, food, etc. On 16 May '73, 15 lakh relief workers came out on roads demanding perpetual and more work.

M.M. Katre is now in Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) after the split in the LNP. He is now mainly dealing with the sugar industry workers. He also concentrated his attention on forming sugarcane growers' coops, which are run by growers, supported by the workers. The producers themselves process sugarcane and sugar, thus eliminating the middleman. Thus, a large number of coops have come into being. Katre deals with the unions all over Maharashtra, from Nagpur to Ahmadnagar and other places.

Sugarcane workers' trade union movement is important. It is also politically crucial in the State. Katre has launched a movement and method, in which the workers in the villages take advances but refuse to migrate to the cities if the terms are not favourable.

Katre and his unions were in the AITUC till 1964. After the CPI-CPM split they decided to come out of the AITUC and form their own Sarva Shramik Sangathan (All Workers' Organisation). Still, they have very good relations with AITUC.

They have organised village kotwals. They have also organised the workers at Sai Baba Temple, now numbering 1000.

#### On reasons of split in the workers' and TU movement

M.M. Katre made a distinct point: according to him, since we are developing country, some gains of development do percolate down. As a result, different sections of workers make more or less gains, some do not. This splits the ranks. Now this possibility of gains is receding, creating better conditions for unity.