

National Labour Institute research project

Ref no. :

Cassette no.17

Name	Ravindra Ramchandra Gavde
Gender	Male
Age	50
Education	SSC
Religion	Hindu
Caste	
Profession	Mill worker
Type of work	Repairer
Address	6/24, Wadi Chawl, in front of Poddar Mills, Lower Parel- 400 013
Telephone	3013376
Mother tongue	Marathi
Place of birth	Pandhur village, Sindhudurg district

Parents

Father	Military Service (Zamadar)
Mother	House wife

Spouse

Vibhyri Gavde (44)	7 th Standar Pass	Housewife
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Siblings

Name	Age	Profession
Satyavan	55yrs	Driver
Ankush	43yrs	Sitaram Mills (Now expired)
Digambar	41yrs	Railways (HO) Officer
Indumati	60yrs	Married
Sushila	52yrs	Married
Usha	47yrs	Married
Asha	45yrs	Married

Children

Name	Age	Education	Profession
Tushar	23yrs	9th	TV mechanic
Vishal	20	SSC	painter
Sushil	16	SSC	Studen

Political affiliation/sympathy:

Pre textile strike (1970 to 1982):	RMMS
During Strike	Datta Samant's Union
Post textile strike (1983 to 1990's):	None

Comments:

The interviewee does some social work as the General secretary of the Wadi Chawl Committee.

Interview with Ravindra Gawde:

What is your name?

Ravindra Ramchandra Gavde.

In which mill were you working?

In Podar Mills. *How long ?*

I was serving there for 16 years and after that I was in the strike.

How many years prior to the strike did you serve.

When the strike started I had served for 16 years.

Were you married then?

Yes.

How come you worked with mills. Were your parents working with mills or did you come from village.

No,no. I am from Bombay only.I am born here.

What did your father do?

My father was with the military.

Then how come you worked with mills? Any influence?

Yes, by influence. There was a distant relative. We used to call him mama. With his help I got employed in the mill.

What did you start as?

As an apprentice.

In which department?

In the weaving department.

And since then did you change any further depts?

Yes after that on the basis of my work I got promotion. Then I went to the fitter line. when the Officers came to know my work they took me to fitter dept. and after that they made me in-charge of the fitter dept.

What salary did you start at?

Salary means I was on badli first, so as I filled in days, I got pay according to the days I worked.

Yet how much for a day?

That way if you went to work for a month, I got 300-350, at that time. Do you want to know the year? That was, I think in 1965.

When were you born?

In 1950.

That is you hae been working since the age of 15yrs? And what about the education?

Non-SSC.

Where did complete school education?

At first, I studied at the Byculla school. I tried to do SSC privately, while I was working but I didn't clear the exams. So non-SSC.

How did you start work? why?

The times were only such that I had to take up a job.

How many siblings?

All brothers and sisters total to eight.

Then all took jobs in the childhood?

No, the eldest amongst had to take up a job. And then there was me. There was no question of the sisters earning, and two of them were married anyway. Remaining four of us. out of these they were very young. I took care of them looked after their education, food and clothing and got them married.

What is the age-difference?

Yes, of course there was little. The four after us had more of an age-gap.

Before the 1982 strike, do you remember any strikes?

Yes, in 1973. Around 73-74.

Do you have any memories of that strike? What happened? Events, incidents?

Nothing much. But on the road, Rosa Deshpande, dange's daughter. There was a meeting at the Delisle road bus stop. The entire road was packed. majority of the workers had amassed at the meeting. And it that meeting while the speech was on, the police started lathi charge. Because of that, we saw the way people were running, their chappals lying here and there. After seeing this site. We came to the conclusion that there is no hope. That is the only memory.

Do you stay here right from birth?

Yes.

Tell me about the identity of Girangoan and ths locality and mill workers?

At that time the circumstances were such that the mill workers was reputed. There was no other livelihood apart from mills. The industries that have grown have done so because of textile mills. The textile worker were highly paid then. At that time I had received 3-4 calls from the employment exchange. But the salary they offered was less. That is why I didn't take it up. I got an offer from BPT also, for a good office job. But I did not take it up. The mills paid highest. So I decided to stay in the mills because of high salary.

Were you interested in strikes/call off participating in them, attending meetings?

No, the circumstances were such that the strike were not intended. The earlier strike called by nine mills, some episode reagrding the bonus. The strike was actually an outcome of the bonus issue. Out of that reason nine mills had gone on strike. And then for the sake of nine mills' workers, you know the unions. Any unioin comes for personal benefits. There were some unions, I won't name them. But through the medium of these unions people were mobilised. And for the sake of these nine mills, rest of the mills had to participate.

But why did they go on the strike? What was the main reason?

The main reason was that there were some demands put forward. Now you know the name of the union, they forwarded some demands before the mill association. The strike happened because of these demands not being met.

What happened in your mill? After the episode of the nine mills, what developments took place that all workers decided to unite and participate in the strike?

The union created the atmosphere. There were meetings, speeches at the gate. They created awareness about our conditions. Already the mill workers were a little disgruntled. There were doubts, and the payment was also low as compared to other industries. Under such circumstances if a new union is formed it would be beneficial. And from this point of view, the people grew attracted to the option of a strike.

What union did you belong to before the 82 strike?

RMMS. It was the only recognised union.

But there were some incidents of forcibly enlisting members?

It was a recognised union and the leaders were inside the mill. The workers who are on badli were asked, do you want to stay on badli? Then register your name with our union. This was the case. Nobody threatened that if you don't enlist your badli will be stopped. But it happened that way. It was done to increase membership to and to retain the recognition of our union.

Weren't you a member of any other union?

No, there were only a few selected. Some participated in the movement, some just tried to see how their union can force itself in the mill industry. And because of this competition, the workers got divided so only RMMS was recognised.

When Datta Samant's union entered?

The circumstances were such that everyone was attracted towards this union so I thought why should I stay back. Where hundreds are there, one person does not make a difference at all. That is why I went there.

Did you agree to the strike whole-heartedly on those demands? Or you did you go with flow?

The demands were a little too excessive. We couldn't tell if all our demands were legitimate. A single person's vote doesn't scare a couple's decision (ektyachya matala dujora bhiti nasto) therefore my lone fight would not affect the situation. So I let it be. I went in this strike with this point of view.

What happened on the first day of the strike?

The first day, gates were closed and the workers were not allowed in, and the union closed the door.

Any fights? Did you see any fights in this area?

Not on this road, no.

Did Datta Samant's men beat up RMMS members?

If I saw with my own eyes I would say. But how can I tell on hearsay. I can't tell exactly the incidents. I'm not that kind of a person. I don't like any such issues. So I did not enter this matter. Our mill leader, the union leader was known to me and so he pulled me along with me. He told me to be on their side. Desai Kalbhor was there. There was no responsibility but I was requested to be on their side.

What do you know about Bhosle's offer to Datta Samant?

At that time, my grandmother died in the village, so I was there. I don't know much about it.

Did you return to your village during the strike? Do you have any land there?

Yes, I did come and go. But I did not return to village. But what happened was that the hope that the strike would be called off any moment, stopped me from going to my village. So I just traveled to and fro. After some months, we got news that our weaving dept. would be scrapped. We went to the gate to ask whether we would be taken back. After some months, people started feeling financial crunch and realised the meaning of hunger. I also knew some people, they told me, "gavde we will go back. We will try. If they take us, we will go." But the watchman kept telling us that no one is admitted in the mills. They kept telling us that come after five days, seven days. Accordingly, we went and met the labour officer. He replied that "your dept is totally scrapped, it is doubtful

whether you will be taken back. We will think about it. But the situation is such that we have not yet taken any worker in the mill!"

After how many months did you return to the mills?

After six months.

What did you do during these months? How did you stretch it for so long?

The atmosphere was such, you see.

Did you go for any speeches, meetings?

Speeches. Yes. At the gate of the mills where they used to say that don't go anywhere, your demands will be met. Thus the speeches were reassuring to us, they tried to encourage us that the demands will be met within some days.

How did people sustain themselves and families ?

I will tell according to my experience. Now I have a big family. My brothers were good, so I could get by. I did not suffer much.

What about other mill-workers?

I have not studied them closely, I have no idea about their condition.

How long after the strike, did you start looking out for a job?

We came to know that the weaving dept was scrapped; there was no question of continuing to sit in anticipation. Nobody was fighting for the cause of the workers. The strike was on, and they were not going back on their words. It was said that the strike will go on till the demands are met. We used to go the union to ask what will happen, what shall we do. The union had promised that we shall be provided with some food supply and some monetary aid. But I personally never went to the union office for such food or monetary help.

What did your brother do then?

My brother used to work.

Did he work in a mill?

No, he was working with Premier. After he retired he started work with Premier. Here he was paid quite well. He supported and took care of us.

Did you learn anything in these six months for a new job? Did you search for a job or self-employment?

As I was a fitter, I got repairing jobs from a couple of mills. I had traveled to Delhi for work as well. Contractors came from all places and took me with them to repair their machines.

What effect did the strike have on your family?

The problem with the family is that if a man is not earning, he has to find work desperately. Because of this I could give any attention to my family and my children. I couldn't educate them.

Do you think strike should have been called off earlier?

If the strike was called off, most families would have settled and the textile industry would have been as it was earlier.

When Datta Samant was given an offer of withdrawing the strike with certain compromises, why did the worker refuse to withdraw?

I have no idea about this, this meeting happened in my absence. I was in the village.

But the workers also stretched the issue? Do you think the conditions would have been different?

In the strike both sides should be considered. The gain side as well as the union's side. If any side is coming out with a thread of resolution (solution) then the worker should act accordingly. This is personal opinion.

When the strike was over and people were taken back did you go?

Why wouldn't I? But when the company started full recruitment and more people were taken, I went. But they told me that my department was scrapped.

Then what did you say?

After some days, a long time after that, in 1993, the judgment of Kohinoor mills case came out. I think the RMMS had filed a common case of NTC. They filed it as the Kohinoor mill case and this case won in Supreme court on the side of Kohinoor. After that, some people fought their own cases they also won. But we had not filed any case on the RMMS advice. they told us that the NTC case is based on the Kohinoor mill only, and whatever judgment is passed is applicable to all the mills. After that, nobody went with their personal cases or mill cases to RMMS.

Unions took out a list of people not taken back to mills, it was included in the case.

But what did the Sangh advise you? Whether you should file a case or not?

They advised me not to file case, as the case was of common NTC. The personal interest or of one mill cannot be considered. This case had walked its way from the labour court to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court had advised that only big cases of mill workers should be considered (large numbers). And the judgment passed on this will be applicable to everyone. Likewise, the Kohinoor mill was considered and judgment was applied. Through the annual they had even publicised this judgment.

And people were notified. RMMS took a meeting, haribhau Naik was there. He called up all the workers that they had won the case and please come. The kohinoor case of 1,600 workers has been solved. On this basis, the remaining mills should be united and the problem should be put forth in the labour court for their judgment. After that both the unions, RMMS and Datta Samant's Kamgar Aghadi started filing complaints. So I went to RMMS to see if my name was included in these cases. But they said my name was not included. I asked them the reason. They said it was because I was blacklisted as I was part of the union. There were many people and I was one of them.

But why? What was the connection?

They said you have become a part of the union. Whether they had taken out their personal wrath or something else, is not known to me.

But you were a part of the RMMS, itslef?

But they put forward their side in such a way that when their side was weak they made someone the scapegoat. This happened not only in our mill but in most of other mills too. Their names were not included in the NTC case. Separate list was prepared for them.

After that I asked RMMS why my name was not there, and then filled a form of the Kamgar Aghadi. This case is being fought.

What have you filed this case against?

This case is so that they pay me my dues and take me back to work.

How long is this case being fought?

I filled the form in 1993. Now my case is on order. I don't know when it shall come.

Did the RMMS hold over workers reduce after the strike?

Yes.

Before this were they very helpful to the cause of the workers?

No, no way. I was in the mill, I didn't feel anything like that. Outside too, there were no gate-meetings. They didn't do any gate-meetings. But later, after some months elapsed, they realised the psychology of the mill workers and stood at the gates to take in some workers.

Did they transport workers in trucks and take them to work?

Yes. But the atmosphere was such. That the mill workers needed security. They had protection behind them. They created the atmosphere to show that our mill is working.

Didn't you go to work with RMMS workers?

I was not taken. Our dept was scrapped then how would they accommodate me. People used to go for ten days at a go to work in the mills. But I thought that why should I step on someone's toes.

Did you look out for another job?

No, as I told you, I was a mechanic. So I got work from outside, I sustained on that.

How did you become mechanics, where did you learn repairing?

I learnt in the company itself. I was not trained. But it was a tradition in every mill then. It was not necessary that all technicians come from IIT. It was tradition that every skilled worker would have someone under him to train. The trainee watched his senior and

learnt the skill and become skilled. These were the helpers. Even these taught others once they learnt. This was a tradition. And we also learnt by only watching the seniors at work.

Did you receive your dues after you lost your job?

Nothing I received. My case is going on.

The workers who received their dues, what did they do?

They took their dues and went back to their native places.

What did they do for a livelihood?

Nothing, some were quite old. They retired early. Some sold their rooms and left for their villages.

Who do you think was responsible for the failure of the strike?

If you want you can take out thousand faults. But I personally have no grudges. If we had received our demands, then we would have we were right. Then how can we say that it was wrong because our demands were not met?

Was it wrong to have prolonged the strike?

See, the mathematics of the demands is such that the union and the owners understand it. The workers don't understand a single thing in it. They only know that someone is fighting for us. They understand only this. Otherwise they don't have much understanding of such issues like how much they'll get or how many demands will be met. Their sight is on what are we getting.

What is your opinion on the mill worker as a person?

Today's situation is such, the political developments are so confused that I don't think that the textile industry can be revived again. Because, you read in the papers too, that they have disabled the entire textile industry. I don't think this industry will resurrect respectfully.

What about the past?

First of all, our whole area is the textile area. Almost 70% people here are mill workers. Such workers were in bigger proportions. Personally, it was question of their livelihood. If

they had not found a job fast, what would they have done sitting idle out here? Some people were there who worked as a coolie or at a banana stall. Due to this quest for work, most of this area had become empty then. It used to look so bare. Like the olden days, when the population was less. How at 7-8pm the area became quiet and silent? It was exactly like that.

When did the workers realise that they should be getting back to work?

No, the outside union and the inside union were not at all affected by this. These things that were happening outside, they were not reaching them. These talks started outside and ended there only, they didn't reach the union.

The workers just discussed and nothing more. The union did what they thought was right. Their own investigations and conclusions.

What about the Shiv Sena union?

I remember only one thing. It was a day of the strike, we had met some Shiv Sena members. They had come to the mill and talked to the leaders. These leaders were of the new union. These Shiv Sainiks met them and were instructing them that we will do this, that. Only that much.

Did they help in the strike?

Whatever that was discussed in between the Shivsainiks and the leaders was not known to us. But later the union that was left was Datta Samant's union.

So that union was not in?

No, after that they sided the stronger union, and after that the union that remained was that of Kamgar Aghadi.

Then who were Kalbhor

Kalbhor was the leader of the Kamgar Aghadi and the rest were pulled in so as to meet the demands of the new union. What generally peoples point of view is that if you are getting the why not go. And that was the main reason for calling the strike.

After the strike did they change their side or are they still into the Girni Kamgar union?

I usually not in touch with them. I just filed the case and I am waiting for the decision