

Ved Mitter Vikh, Railways, BMS/BRMS, Delhi

Name	Ved Mitter Vikh, Railways, BMS/BRMS, Delhi,
Date of Interview	1 st October, 2002.
Time	From 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Place & Context	The interview was conducted in the office where Shri. Ved Mitr currently works in his old age as social service. The office is in the premises of the Sanathan Dharam Mandir located in Jangpura, near Niazamuddin in Delhi. Jangpura is a Punjabi refugee dominated area i.e. those who came after the partition. Now he is in his late 70s and not in good health. We did the interview in the first floor of office next to the Sanatan Dharam temple. Ved Mitter Vikh was also a partition refugee.
Interviewers	Anil Rajimwale & Bobby Poullose.

Biographical Sketches

Ved Mitter Vikh was born on 6th August 1927 at Baba Bakola in Amritsar. His first job was as a civil clerk at Drigh Road near the America Air Base in Karachi before the Second World War. In May 1946 he joined the railways and was transferred to Lahore in January 1947. At that time he did not know anything about the rail trade unions. Vikhji was a member of RSS from his childhood in school and he was inspired by its social service activities from 1942. In 1964 RSS told him to start working in BMS and with the BRMS union in railways i.e. Uttar Railway Karamchari Union (URKU). Vikhji's first agitation was the 2nd July 1965 agitation over the issue of victimization of a worker for not wearing office clothes. It was the same agitation in which Badri Prasad Sharma participated. It went on for four months. Then he participated in the 9th September 1968 strike in which both railways and central government employees participated. He organized the rail workers at the Loco Shed in Delhi. In the 1968 strike Vikhji was jailed for several days. He also participated in the 1974 rail strike. And was arrested on 9th May 1974 and jailed for 28 days. During the Janta party government Vikhji became personal assistant to the Minister of State for Labour. During 1974 Vikhji was one of the leaders of the Delhi Pradesh BMS and from 1980 to 1985 he became the national vice-president of the BRMS. During the emergency his house was also raided.

Transcript Summary:

Interview Summary:- Shri. Ved Mitter Vikh started the interview by saying he was born on 6th August, 1927 at Baba Bakola, Amritsar. He had education in the village till matriculation in 1944 and then went to Quetta, Baluchistan where his elder brother was in the railways. Then he went to Karachi as a Civil Clerk at Drigh Road where the American Air Base was there for the Second World War. Then after May 1946 Ved Mitter Vikh joined the railways and was transferred to Lahore in Jan. 1947. **One important information Vikhji indicated that here was a strike in the North Western Railways (NWR) in 1946 which he heard about after his joining the railways in Lahore.** Otherwise Vikhji was ignorant about the railway workers struggle.

Vikhji said that he was inspired by the idea of doing social work and this aspect of RSS really inspired him to join it. **He joined RSS in 1942.** At that time he was in school. **After having worked in various fields under the RSS he was sent to BMS in Oct. 1964.**

As he was in railways at that time he was asked by the BMS to form a branch at Baroda House of the Uttar Railway Karamchari Union (URKU) and also be part of the Bharatiya Rail Mazdoor Sangh (BRMS).

As regards his activism, the first case Ved Mitter Vikhji took up was at Baroda House that of Mangal Singh who was charged by the GM for not wearing the necessary uniform. Vikhji claimed that he was the one who first took up the case. But when he did so, he was told by the management that the union was not recognized. He says therefore though he launched the case, later it was taken up by the recognised unions. Ved Mittr Vikhji said that he worked with Badri Sharma of the AITUC and both tried to expose the financial corruption of the leaders of the recognized unions in this case. As regards the TU struggle he was of the view that though the AITUC and BMS work separately, they will ultimately have to come together.

The next agitation activity Ved Mittr Vikhji participated in was with regard to the 9th Sept. 1968 Central Govt Employees strike in which the railway unions were also involved. Vikhji said his responsibility was to organize the rail workers at the Loco Shed in Delhi. He had acquired some initial experience in working with these workers through leaders like Mahesh Phatak (BMS) and Hazara Singh (AITUC). It was during the 1968 rail and govt. employees strike that Ved Mittr Vikhji was arrested and jailed for several days. Later on he was bailed and one Mr. K.L. Arora of the Supreme Court fought his and 40 other rail employees of Baroda Houses' case and won it. In this BMS leader Mr. Jagdish Lal played a very helpful role.

When the 8th May, 1974 rail strike took place Ved Mittr Vikhji also participated in it and during the joint meetings he argued against any kind of sabotage or armed action

by the rail workers and that there must be no division of the areas of TU action among the trade unions. This was his broad line. He said we should not work for any political stance rather the aim of the strike action should be for the workers and see to it that the strike should be effective. **Ved Mittr Vikhji was arrested during the strike on 9 May 1974 along with 28 other rail workers and put in the Metropolitan jail for more than 28 days.** The strike was called off. Vikhji saw how the strike deteriorated and was of the view that it was a blot in the record of employees. He was in jail with the famous rail TU leader in those days Mr. Nada. What he felt after the 1974 strike was that we should rise above our organizational loyalties and work unitedly for the workers only. Then only something can be done for them.

When the Janta party govt. came to power in 1977 Ved Mittr Vikhji was a personal assistant to the Jan Sangh Minister of State for Labour. Due to this his house was raided during the Emergency by the police. **During 1974 Ved Mittr Vikhji was one of the leaders of the Delhi Pradesh BMS. Later on in 1980 to 1985 Vikhji became the National Vice President of the BRMS.**

As of now he was not active but the BMS was trying for recognition of its railway union. Vikhji's main inspiration according to him was the spirit of the RSS whose slogan for the workers is

“Desh Ke Hith Me Karege Kam”

“Kam Ka Lenge Barabar Dam”

Vikhji was of the view that trade union movement in India is influenced by politics and affiliation to one of the other political party. This affects it.

Vikhji said that the Bonus issue was first and foremost raised by the BMS into the rail trade union movement. Of course the recognized union later took it up as their issue, but the BMS was the first to raise the issue. He then talked about his college from BMS/RSS who is currently living in Ghaziabad and who according to him was a real thinker and the founder of category-wise unions from the BMS/RSS side. His name was Ved Prakash Kohli. Vikhji said that Kohliji ultimate dream was to form a recognized confederation of various categories of rail worker trade unions. However this didn't happen and recognition was a problem. **As regards the 1974 rail strike Ved Mittr Vikhji said though it was crushed at that time in the long run it was the most historical strike and turned out to be a success as after it the government installed a Pay Commission and due to it only till today all govt. employees got pay rises. Thus it was not a failure but succeeded.**