

No20- SHAMBHU NATH BANERJEE:-

Shambhu Nath Banerjee is also a unique trade unionist in the sense he is one of the few practicing pandits who still does his social job of priest to many devotees who come to Gaya to conduct 'shraad' ceremonies. He is a senior priest associated with a Bengali ashram i.e. Bharat Sevashram Sangh and he made a union of the pundits in Gaya also. Gaya is a very big religious center of Hinduism and also Buddhism. Shambhu Nath Banerjee's family is one which was deeply involved in the terrorist movement against the British during the freedom movement. Shambhu Nath Banerjee is also a freedom fighter and trade unionist from pre-independence days in 1946 though he was just a youth at that

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time. He organized unions in the Cotton and Jute Mills, railways, defense employees in the Gaya defense cantonment, bank employees union, agricultural labour union i.e. called khet mazdoor union against landlordism in Gaya, Jehanabad. He also fought the naxalism against his unions in khet mazdoor in Gaya and Jehanabad. Then his other great trade union work has been among the stone crushing workers in Bihar mainly in Gaya and Jehanabad. These workers have the worst kind of jobs and are in a bad shape and with liberalization even the owners are in a bad shape.

**20. SHAMBHU NATH BANERJEE. Unorganized Sector/ Textiles/
Engineering/Small Scale Industries. Gaya, Bihar.**

Date:- 3rd January 2003.

Time:- 4.00 pm to 8.40 pm.

Venue:- At premises of Bharat Sevashram Sangh, in Gaya.

Interviewer:- Bobby Poulouse.

Context:- Shambhu Nath Banerjee is a very thin and very old man of 76 years but of remarkable health, innocence, cheer and great sense of humor. He came through as a man of remarkable simplicity yet terrible grit in fighting for what he believed in. He is a pandit who even till date conducts shraad ceremonies for the many believers who come to Gaya particularly from Bengal, Manipur and Assam. His faithful respect him greatly. He made a union of pundits in Bharat Sevashram Sangh an ashram built by some saint like sadhu who wanted to provide clean, cheap, cheating free shraad ceremonies for the devoted who came from all parts of the country. Shambhu Nath Banerjee truly is a noble soul in the midst of today's kalyug. His contribution to the trade union movement in and around Gaya is unparalleled. All respect. He belongs to an age which is dying in the post-liberalized India.

Shambhu Nath Banerjee began his interview by talking about his birth on 1st July 1928 at Gaya. His family was basically from Dhaka and all were involved in the freedom movement's terrorist groups of Bengalis. His family was full of terrorists. This heritage was definitely there in the background. In 1945 after his schooling and involvement in AISF he came back to Gaya and became a volunteer trade union worker at the Gaya Cotton & Jute Mill Workers Union. In 1948 he joined at Danapur the Railroad Workers Union. Till 1952 he was underground due to ban on left. In 1962 he was arrested when lots of left were arrested in the context of the Indo-China war. Later he became the Gaya College union secretary. In 1956-57 he led land struggles for landless labour mainly dalits in Gaya and Jehanabad belt and lot of land was distributed. In 1964 Shambhu Nath Banerjee organized and registered a Defence Civilian Employees Union which later got affiliated to AIDEF at the Gaya Cantonment area. He is leader of this union even today. He led many struggles against the arbitrary behaviour of officers and issues of wage and pension etc. In 1946 much before the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) was registered Shambhu Nath Banerjee organized one of first bank unions in the country and along with Ajay Saran Mukherjee and Prant Chakravarti registered the Gaya District Bank Employees Association (GDBEA). At that time there was no all India bank employees body. He launched many struggles through GDBEA and later government forced to give Shastri Award and later Sen Award which formed the basis of future payment systems.

In engineering also there was a private company Daya Engineering Works Pvt. Ltd in Gaya. Shambhu Banerjee organized the workers there in which manufactured electric poles for the railways. In 1970s he registered a union in the company called Daya Engineering Works Employees Union. The wage was bad in those days and his union he narrated fought many battles. But in 1980s when the company was in crisis Shambhu Banerjee through the union gave the company a lease of life and new business in the crisis by telling them to build sleepers for railways and for that he introduced them the Czechoslovak rail company with which they collaborated and today supply sleepers to railway. Thus the company was saved by workers help and workers got the employment.

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Then he narrated how Gaya Cotton and Jute Mill Labour Union was registered by Vishwanath Mathur and Sunil Mukherjee and Jaganath Sarkar and Basawan Singh in 1945-46. However in 1946 Vishwanath Mathur was attacked badly and left the area and after that they became weak in the union. Then in 1968 they registered a new union named Gaya Cotton & Jute Mill Workers Union and which function very well once there was nationalization of cotton and textile mills taken over under NDC. Then they struggled a lot and gave lot of rights previously not there for cotton and textile workers. But since liberalization and govt. change in textile policy since Dec. 2002 the mill in Gaya is closed though still under govt. and workers are getting wages as the fight is still going on. Then he narrated his work with the Aluminium industry which is also there in Gaya and he built unions there and there were many struggles. Then he narrated his work among the landless agricultural labour under the Gaya Zilla Khet Mazdoor Union since 1953. Under it Shambhu Banerjee led many struggles in Gaya region on issues of wage, shelter, social justice and caste exploitation, building wells, seeds, bhoodan movement. Shambhu Banerjee said that they could even fight the naxals who tried to destroy their union among the agricultural labour.

Among the other unorganized sector Shambhu Banerjee organized the stone breaking mazdoors in Gaya and formed the Gaya Zilla Pather Thod Mazdoor Union in 1969. Shambhu Nath Banerjee was the main secretary with others like Chaturaran Mishra, and P.K. Ganguly. There is terrible exploitation of the stone breaking workers and through various struggles which Shambhu Banerjee led personally in the Gaya region he got them facilities which were never there for them like better wages, better service conditions, ESI, EPF, facilities for women, various safety things as in this blasting of stone is there. However today after liberalization the stone crushing owners are in crisis due to Bihar govt. new ruling that leases would be for one year not the previous ten years. Shambhu Banerjee says this his not just the whole industry but also the workers as companies can't give many facilities they gave before as they have now too short a life. So these were broadly the unions Shambhu Nath Banerjee organized and he is married has two elder children and he takes no wage from the union or party but earns his own money by doing shraad ceremonies for the devotees who come to Gaya. He works in this capacity at the Bharat Sevashram Sangh a Bengali religious ashram for those who come for shraad to Gaya. This is the way he paid his wife and brought up his children by some money he made through his religious vocation. He can only be classified as a great pundit or priest though a leftist truly living and performing the message of god on earth. In that sense he is a unique personality and an icon in Gaya city one of the most ancient cities of India which is the home of Buddha.

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