

Short biographical note on

16. **Kulwant Singh, Jagadhari (Haryana)**

Kulwant Singh, a major railway leader, was born in 1933 in a village called Daduwali in Sialkot district (Pakistan). After partition, he came to India in 1947 with his family. He was a 15-year-old boy then. His father had a hotel in Rawalpindi. They did not have any ancestral property. As they were landless, hotel was the only source of income. While coming to India, the family had lost everything and Kulwant Singh had to take up a job in 1949 in Railways as a fourth grade employee. But he continued with his studies even after taking up a job and passed matriculation in 1950.

It was at this stage when he started reading about Russia and also about Chinese revolution. Soon he was transferred to Jagadhari and got involved in the movement in the Railways.

It was at this stage when at Kalka, the railwaymen came out with five demands on which there was deadlock. Finally, as the chairman GB Pandey was going to Shimla in a motor car from Kalka railway station, the workers tried to stop him by covering the tracks. The chairman refused to even listen to their demands. The undeterred workers could not be dispersed with lathicharge and then the police resorted to firing. At least five workers were killed and many wounded. In support of the workers entire area went on lightening strike. Kulwant Singh organised the workers at Jagadhari and there was total strike. Even the citizens from the town cooperated with the railwaymen.

In Punjab, when the call for strike was given in 1960, the government was well prepared to face the situation and not to repeat the events of 1956.

In 1960 strike, Kulwant Singh actively took part in the agitational activities. Those days large number of workers used to participate in agitations and Jullundher, Bhatinda, Ludhiana, Kalka were the centres of agitation in Punjab which had become volatile against the Black Ordinance of the then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru against the Railway workers' movement. The strike call was given by Jaiprakash Narayan.

In the movement, 2500 AITUC cadres were victimised. As a consequence, the hold of the AITUC over Railway Men's Federation got weakened.

In 1971, the AITUC formed its own organisation in the northern zone, called Northern Railway Workers' Union which had overwhelming support though did have recognition. Gradually several leaders left the union because without recognition it was not possible to function.

In 1972-73, there was ban even on gate meetings. The AITUC union was undeterred and at Jagadhari, the workers under the leadership of Kulwant Singh decided to violate the ban. At least 21 workers had decided to face punishment. Everyday, seven workers started speaking at the gate, The administration had to surrender and since then there was never ban.

The workers were militant and the entire area from Kalka to Jagadhari was called "Red Belt".

In 1974, when the call for agitation was given, strike committee was formed alongwith HMS and INTUC for joint action. Though the workers from all categories came forward in this strike, the Loco Running Staff

wanted to bargain for their own category and their participation was at a low key.

In the joint action Committee for struggling railwaymen, the prominent unions were HMS and the AITUC led Northern Workers' Union. The recognition for HMS led union, Northern Railwaymen's Federation was withdrawn and the government made it a condition that unless George Fernandes resigned they would not get back the recognition. Finally George Fernandes resigned and the Federation got back its recognition.

However the JCM had killed the fighting capacity of the workers. Kulwant Singh and other activists had opposed it at Ajmer convention. However, after 1974, there was no national level agitation.

In this strike, the main demand was bonus and they got it. In 1960, the strike was for minimum wages but government refused. In 1974, wage parity was also demanded but refused. However, in 1960 and 1968, all central government employees had taken part in the agitation while in 1974, only railwaymen took part in the strike.

16. Short transcriptive note on Kulwant Singh, Jagadhari (Haryana)

I was born in 1933 in a village called Daduwali in Sialkot district (Pakistan). After partition, our family came to India in 1947. I was a 15-year-old boy then. My father had a hotel in Rawalpindi. They did not have any ancestral property. As they were landless, hotel was the only source of income. While coming to India, the family had lost everything and I had to take up a job in 1949 in Railways as a fourth grade employee. But I did not leave my studies even after taking up a job and passed matriculation in 1950.

I was greatly interested in the world events and followed the developments in Russia and China. Chinese revolution influenced me a lot. Soon I was transferred to Jagadhari and got involved in the movement in the Railways.

It was at this stage when at Kalka, the railwaymen came out with five demands on which there was deadlock. Finally, as the chairman GB Pandey was going to Shimla in a motor car from Kalka railway station, the workers tried to stop him by covering the tracks. The chairman refused to even listen to their demands. The undeterred workers could not be dispersed with lathicharge and then the police resorted to firing. At least five workers were killed and many wounded. In support of the workers entire area went on lightening strike. I organised the workers at Jagadhari and there was total strike. Even the citizens from the town cooperated with the railwaymen.

In Punjab, when the call for strike was given in 1960, the government was well prepared to face the situation and not to repeat the events of 1956.

In 1960 strike, I was able to mobilise the worker in large numbers in the agitational activities. Those days Jullundher, Bhatinda, Ludhiana, Kalka were the centres of agitation in Punjab which had become volatile against the Black Ordinance of the then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru against the Railway workers' movement. The strike call was given by Jaiprakash Narayan.

In the movement, 2500 AITUC cadres were victimised. As a consequence, the hold of the AITUC over Railway Men's Federation got weakened.

In 1971, the AITUC formed its own organisation in the northern zone, called Northern Railway Workers' Union which had overwhelming support though did have recognition. Gradually several leaders left the union because without recognition it was not possible to function.

In 1972-73, there was ban even on gate meetings. The AITUC union was undeterred and at Jagadhari, we decided to violate the ban. I convinced the workers and a decision was taken to involve 21 workers who would face punishment. Everyday, seven workers addressed the meeting at the gate. The administration had to surrender and since then there was never ban.

The workers were militant and the entire area from Kalka to Jagadhari was called "Red Belt".

In 1974, when the call for agitation was given, strike committee was formed alongwith HMS and INTUC for joint action. Though the workers from all categories came forward in this strike, the Loco Running Staff wanted to bargain for their own category and their participation was at a low key.

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However the JCM had killed the fighting capacity of the workers. We had opposed it along with other activists at Ajmer convention. However, after 1974, there was no national level agitation.

In 1974 strike, the main demand was bonus and we got it. In 1960, the strike was for minimum wages but government refused. In 1974, wage parity was also demanded but refused. However, in 1960 and 1968, all central government employees had taken part in the agitation while in 1974, only railwaymen took part in the strike.

Date: 7th Nov. 2002

Time: ~~After~~ Morning

Venue: Jagadri

Interviewers: KrishnaJha.

Context: