

Gyanendra Nagoji Yelkar (DN Yelkar) (AITUC), Worker VETERAN

A short transcriptive note on Gyanendra Nagoji Yelkar (AITUC) interviewed on July 29, 2004 in Bombay

I was born in Begoude in Kolhapur district on March 3, 1921 in a very poor family. My father Nagoji had a small plot of land but no means to cultivate it. The problems of acute poverty led him to drinking. When he was drunk, he used to beat my mother and me both mercilessly.

When I was seven, my mother asked me to leave home as I was old enough to earn and look after myself. Mother wanted me to get away from my father's beatings. She had nothing to give me for the journey and without ticket, I travelled upto Kurla in train.

I knew that my villagemen lived at Bilal road and were working in various factories. But I was too young to join a factory. Hence till then, I had to work in a hotel with a salary of Rs 2 a month. I got food from the hotel and did not spend a single money from the wages I earned. After a year, when I had saved Rs 24, I went back home and gave my father all my money to buy plough and bullocks and cultivate the land.

I joined kids' movement called Vanar Sena launched by the Congress and led by Indira Gandhi when I was eight. I met Gandhiji at Pune. In 1942, when Quit India movement started, I joined in and soon was sent to jail for four months. After release, I joined Sitaram mills at half salary of Rs 6 as I was too young.

I worked in the factory for thirty years. In the beginning I was asked to work anywhere like a coolie. However, as I had learned to read and write on my own, I was given the job of ticket boy to check the workers' ticket as they entered and left the factory premises.

I taught myself in my spare time and soon was promoted as clerk at the salary of Rs 2000. It was only when I got heart attack in 1986, that I got retired. A pace maker has been inserted which was imported from United States and is operative since then on batteries that have to be recharged every four months.

I was very close to Dange and never left his side all my life. I used to spend days at Dalwi Bhawan, the trade union and party office of the CPI.

In 1946, when naval mutiny was launched, I was instrumental in closing the road on Chinchpokli for eight hours. We had collected wood from old furniture and kept them burning on both sides of the road so that no policeman could cross the barricade of fire.

When there was textile strike, the management refused to pay any wages to the workers. As a result, they could not afford to buy food from the roadside dhabas run by women. At least 20000 women sat on dharna on the road for 48 hours to get wages for the workers so that the food cooked by them could be sold. It was called "Latni (Belan) Morcha" and many women lead-

ers emerged from the movement like Ahilya Bai Ranganekar, Prema Poorab etc.

S. A. Dange came to visit the women on dharna and organised their meeting, but police attacked them. They opened fire and I was shot at forehead but saved.

I was the treasurer of the Girni Kamgar union and for eight years worked on third shift which was a night duty in the factory to be able to work in the daytime at the union office.

I used to live in room lined with bunks meant for shift workers. In one single room of ten by fifteen square feet, at least forty workers used to live sharing the bed according to their shifts. There were at least 80 rooms in every building.

After 1949, I also went underground and was sent to Andhra Pradesh. I visited Nalgonda, Nizamabad, Telengana and many other places meeting Nagi Reddy, Krishna Pillai and many others.

In 1970s, Shiv Sena used to attack the AITUC office. At Parel, Kaka Desai was beaten up and literature and books were burnt. They wanted to scare the communists. It was at the same time when Krishna Desai was killed by them.

I was like shadow of Dange and has been mentioned by Com Usha Tai Dange, Comrade Dange's wife, in her autobiography with great affection and respect.

Gyanendra Nagoji Yelkar (DN Yelkar) (AITUC), Veteran GKU WORKER

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