

B.V. Kakilaya, Karnataka

He was born on 11th April 1919. He comes from a landlord family, his father being a 'Patel' in 1920-30s. That was the time of the Great Economic Depression. His father died when the son was yet very young. Brothers educated him. Their joint family had connections with the Congress and the national movement. Those were the days when 'Guruvayur Satyagraha, temple entry' by Gandhiji, etc. took place.

Kakilaya passed his SLC in 1937 from Kasargod (now in Kerala). He came to Mangalore for college studies in science. He became involved in the Independence Day celebrations in Mangalore under the leadership of K.R. Karanth. He became active in the student movement.

Entry into Trade Union movement:

Mangalore and surrounding area had a large number of tile factories, around 1936. Quite often, spontaneous strikes used to take place. The workers of Commonwealth Tile Factory, a British establishment, were on strike in 1944. They wanted some educated person to help them. The tile workers came to Kakilaya for help and guidance and help them put up their case before the managing director. That was the first contact of Kakilaya with the T.U. movement. He later became the founder of the Tile workers union in Mangalore in 1944. It had a membership of 6000 workers.

Kakilaya, by this time, was full-steam in the workers and TU movement. He organised beedi, handloom, printing press, cashew nut, and other workers. The cashew workers movement had distinct characters. The women workers among them were a powerful force. They fought for better working conditions e.g. they demanded supply of hand-gloves and chappals to protect them from injury due to cashew-nut oil. Besides, they raised their voice in defence of their self-respect. Kakilaya, along with his colleagues, also organised separate women and children's conferences in the course of cashew workers' conference. Moreover, the tile workers' movement was non-communal.

Kakilaya worked actively for the people when cholera broke out in Mangalore at that time i.e. in 1944-45. He also organised relief work for the Bengal famine and carried on de-hoarding campaign. He along with others in TUs introduced informal rationing in the areas of the town when the administration refused to move. Also did relief work during the floods.

In 1946, the governor announced a cut of two ounces in ration. From Mangalore to Shornoor, Kakilaya and others organised demonstrations and clashed with police. Beedi workers used to get 6 annas as wages at that time. Just to get an increase of 2 annas, they had to go on a strike of 52 days. Kakilaya and other leaders collected donations, rice, other food materials, etc. to sustain the strike.

The first south canara district trade union conference was held in 1944, and second, third and fourth at regular intervals. They were presided by prominent leaders like

Dange and others. Kakilaya, in the meantime, was arrested several times. He was in Cannanore jail with R.I. for two years. He was released on 15th August '47. He was in several jails during 1948-51 after initially being underground, including Vellore jail. He had escaped from the Dhavangere jail. He was finally released in 1952 after the judgement on A.K. Gopalan vs. Union of India case under DI Act.

There was a big movement around Loknath Shetty murder case. He was a terror to the workers. There was general resentments. He was communal also. Workers prepared for general strike. He died in a clash. Several leaders were arrested accused of murder. But they were ultimately acquitted by higher court.

He fought and worked in general elections, and was a legislator too. He participated in the Goa satyagraha of 1955. Even today, B.V. Kakilaya continues to take an active part in the trade union organisation and in guiding the various organisations and movements.