

(13) ANATHA THIRTHA

Anantha Thiratha is now 70 years and is easily one of the tallest AITUC leaders in Karnataka. He was born into a big landlord Brahmin family in village of Mudbagal in 1934. He belonged to a family of a total of 16 children. He did his schooling in a 'national school' made in the days of the freedom fight. His uniform was Gandhi cap, thus those values of the freedom struggle did percolate. His friend circle was very good helping the weaker students. He then studied in Vijaya College. One of his brothers joined Indian Air Force. Then did diploma in Textile technology. Came into TU movement after being influenced by the speeches of M.C.Narsimhan and Suryanarayana Rao and by reading books of PPH and on Chinese revolution. He can speak Tamil, Hindi, and the South Indian languages. In 1953-54 he was touring Tamil Nadu. He was deeply influenced by Sir. C.P.Ramaswamy Naikar and his deep criticism of Brahminism though he himself was a Brahmin and his critique of caste system. He learnt small engineering works like welding, turning etc. He had qualities of honesty and constant desire to fight injustice which he realized in the course of his working with various proprietors. He tried to get them to allow work for 8 hours and 12 hours which they were doing but though he lead but got in those days got betrayed by the 32 workers of the small engineering unit and he resigned. Then he worked in small laundry unit and there also he had a fight with the proprietor and fought. He married in 1962. It was a simple marriage. However he continued his TU work in which he faced severe tests by way of the fact that the management was using all underhand methods. After his marriage for his TU he pawned the gold he got from his in-laws. In the Gauri festival all wives bring out their gold. As his wife could not find that gold during the festival his relatives and wife started suspecting him of falling into bad habits and losing all the family money. It was then that his wife and he also later decided to end their lives as they felt their

marriage had failed. It was a very difficult time for Anantha Tirtha but somehow his wife decided against it and both decided to fight the difficult personal circumstances they had to face due to his TU life. At that time he was working as a factory assistant in GessKeyens Company. There he organised the workers and formed unions for workers and staff members and had to face many personal battles and the management used all sorts of tricks to make him unpopular among workers and force him to quit. But the workers realized the sincerity and honesty of him. Then he resigned in 1972 from his job and became wholetime TU activist in the Davanghere textile mills area where due to the CPI split and murder of two top AITUC leaders by CPM people due to intra-left rivalry. So the challenge facing the existence of AITUC in Davengere forced Anantha Thirtha and five others in Karnataka all left their jobs- Ananatha Subha Rao and others. The situataion of extreme rivalry between AITUC and CITU contiued from 1970 to 1974. It was a very tough situation. In `that period in unions in textiles, bauxite, chemicals, and in major and minor minerals and gold in Kolar Gold Fields. Anatha Thiratha was associated with all these very difficult industries connected with mining and chemicals and minerals like also copper, chromite. He worked relentlessly against the sale and privatization of public sector mines in basic minerals as he said that without this the whole edifice of all other PSU in for e.g. railways, defence etc all are depended on transfer of copper etc minerals from the govt. mines. Added to sale of PSUs is the onset of the new machines and technologies which in all sectors from textiles etc is removing labour i.e. machine is replacing man. He was associated with the paper making industries, mollasses industry making liquor. He organised and dealt with workers of these industries also. He also organised the cement industry workers, sugar worker unions in many mills and he led many struggles in these industries on all issues affecting workers. Conducted many solidarity struggles in the sugar industry. Then he has also organised workers of rice mills. He is one of the Secretaries of Karnataka AITUC. Then plywood industry, small engineering, and unorganised industries like snuff industry, tailoring industry, loading unloading workers i.e. hamalies. Anantha Thiratha is definitely a great surivivor and fighter in the TU movement of Karntaka.



ANANTHA TIRTHA, Bangalore.

The interview with Anantha Tirtha who is now in his 80s too proved to be very important from the labour history point of view for he provided a full glance of the TU history from the 40s and 50s in Karnataka. He narrated his life story how he was born in a feudal rich Brahmin family and how he for more than 6 years worked dedicatedly in the RSS and how models were Golwalkar who he saw in a meeting and felt blessed. He also narrated how he fell out with the RSS and moved into the mainstream later. In between he narrated how he worked as a workman to a laundry shop owner then as a workman cum manager to a mechanic shop owner and how he first organized his co-workers there but in the process got thrown and how he came out of all this and later joined a company as a workman and there he worked for many years and organized the workers and he was removed and finally came full time in the trade union. About the TU movement he narrated how even his marital life at one juncture was going to collapse when he had to pawn even his wife's jewelry to pay for the various expenditures to save a particular union which at that

time was being denied recognition. And as a result all his wife's relatives thought he used to spend his wife's jewelry in some illegitimate activities and his wife as a result decided to commit suicide for she felt it was her ill-fate to have married a man like Anantha Tirtha too decided to die but his wife changed her decision in the last moment. They produced only one child a girl. It was also a decision taken due to the conditions created by the TU work. Anantha Tirtha narrated in depth the various unions he was associated with from Davagere Textile Mills unions that were many in the town of Davagere. Then Kolar Gold Fields unions where most of the workers were scheduled castes. Then he worked among a host of unions in the chromium mines sector, bauxite mines sector and various other mines related industries as Karnataka was rich in iron and other mineral resources. Then he worked in chemical industries, iron ore industries, and various unions in the IT industries like WIPRO etc in and around Bangalore city. Overall what one gets from the interview with Anantha Tirtha is that he is definitely one of the big leaders of the TU movement in Karnataka.