

National Labour Institute

Oral History Project

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Bal Nar:

Bal Nar is an activist in the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti, and is now an active leader of the union in Piramal Mills where he now works. His political journey took him from early years in the Shiv Sena, then the Congress and then as a founder member of the independent Closed Mills Committee after the closure of the mill in which he worked. In the period to which he refers here he was living in Mahalaxmi in the Modern Mills compound where he also worked then.

' Balasaheb used to move around in the lanes and bylanes of Girangaon in order to mobilise support for his organisation. He came to Modern Mills, and he took meetings there. Wherever young people like us called him he would come- people were not in awe of him as they are today. Nor was he afraid. Justice for the *Marathi manus*- that was the slogan, the inspiration before us.

We could see it before our eyes- the street vendors, the traders were all outsiders- Madrasis, Gujarathis, Telugu and they would not treat us with respect. They would do *dadagiri*. They were organised. No one could oppose them. As the Shiv Sena grew, then when some of them got beaten then they started behaving with respect. They realised the strength of Sena as an organisation. We had no political knowledge then, it was an emotional response. We got carried away. As time went by, we became more aware. Jobs were an important issue. That morcha to the Air India, where we beat up the general Manager- the boys had fielded so well; he will remember it all his life. He was dragged from the lift upto his cabin, and he was beaten all the way. But it had an impact. Maharashtrians were recruited. I was in that morcha. Incidents like these convinced the youth that the Sena stood for Maharashtrians.

Our first *Shakha* Pramukh (branch leader) was Ramesh Labde. He used to go around canvassing support and we would accompany him. Ramesh Labde set up a

shakha in Modern Mills. It was a small makeshift place built over a gutter. Like a urinal. It was just a thatch. It had to be rebuilt several times. We would sit there. In those days when we wanted to organise Shiv Jayanthi we would collect 2 or 3 rupees each from the local *baniyas*. Ramesh was an educated man. He was a Hindi teacher in the Christian school on Arthur Road. He was smart, he could pick up people; he knew who would be useful. The rest of us did not know anything about politics. We were in school then, and we would all roam around with Labde. That way we built the organisation and the *shakha*. We told people about 80% reservation for Maharashtrians, about the Belgaum Karwar border issue- *Belgaum Karwar Maharashtra, naahin kunacha baapacha!* (Belgaum Karwar belongs to Maharashtra, not to your father).

Then Sena participated in the Corporation elections. We campaigned for Labde. He lost but by just 49 votes! Congress won the seat. Balasaeb came for the street corner meetings. Navalkar too. We used to go to Balasaeb's house in Kalanagar also to meet him. And he would come down to meet us. Now he won't entertain us if we go.

We used to oppose any misbehaviour in those days. If we caught a *sainik* harassing a woman or looting, say stealing *chikoos* from a UP vendor, we would not hesitate to administer a couple of slaps. Those who did not tolerate such behaviour were in the majority then. There was no corruption either. I know our *Shakha* didn't even have any money. In 1970 our *Shakha* had just 4000 rupees. All mostly from membership of 1 or 2 rupees, and some contributions for Shiv Jayanthi from local blackmarketeers, like the liquor and matka owners. There was no extortion but we would go in a bunch of 20-30 to make the collection. Shiv Jayanthi was made an important festival because of the Sena. Sena also became more visible because of their participation in the traditional Ganeshotsav. The Sena placed its cadre in the Ganeshotsav Mandals. That also helped the organisation.

One issue that we took up was the issue of the name boards on the shops. If they were not written in Marathi we smeared them with tar. Balasaeb asked us to do that. One thing- Balasaeb always supported his cadres then. When the murder of Krishna Desai took place, and Ashok Kulkarni and Khatate etc. were arrested then

Balasaheb declared publicly- ' If I ever have to humble myself it will be for my *sainiks* never for myself'. There was some help from the Congress to settle that case. That's why when Ramrao Adik stood for elections, Shiv Sena supported him. At that time Bandu Shingre opposed Balasaheb, because he wanted Sena to field a candidate and fight for that seat. Anyway, after that election, these boys were released. About Krishna Desai I never knew very much. We were told that he used to teach the young boys to sing Russian songs. That he propagated communism. He was fearless, people said. The *lal bawta* did as much *to-d-phod* when they were the main opposition union in the mills. I have seen that myself. We had heard the speeches of people like Acharya Atre and Gulabrao Ganacharya- they would all come to our lane. During the elections when Gulabrao stood for the Assembly, then Shahir Amar Sheikh would come with his troupe and sing. Here near the post office. Street corner meetings. Amar Sheikh lived just in front of Modern Mills. We did not like communism. The communists started to decline after the attack on their Dalvi Building office in Parel.. The whole office was burnt and everything was thrown out on the streets. Bandu Shingre was the main person involved in these attacks. Balasaheb hated communism. Why? I don't know, he never gave any reasons. His stand has always been- no deal with the communists. Anyone else we can talk with he said but not the communists. He allied even with the socialists, but never the communists.

But as I said he always saved his *sainiks*. In my case, I was arrested after the communal riots of 1970. . We were accused of throwing bombs on the mosque near Vithal Niwas in Saat Rasta. The incident was first raised in the Assembly by Gulabrao Ganacharya. No, I was not involved in the incident. About 15 days after that, the police came to my house at 3am. I was in my shorts and I said, at least let me put on my clothes. They said we just want to talk with you. But I knew. Mehendale was a CID then. I had just taken a card from the employment exchange that morning. So I said at least let me submit the card. It's a question of my future. If I didn't have a job, I would have no alternative but to take to the path of crime. But they didn't allow me. They promised to release me in the morning but they I was kept in jail for 27 days. Balasaheb called the police station and told the Commissioner not to harass us. We were 9 of us. When we went to Balasaheb for financial help he told us- wear bangles and then come to me for money (meaning

don't be like women). He challenged us, see? So we had to collect money for the case ourselves. From whom? Naturally from the liquor and *Matka* operators. Who else? Nothing happened to me, and that was because of the clout that the Sena had. Because of this, I also got a job later as a fitter in the mill. But I started to feel differently. I felt all this was not right. The Sena called a strike in Hindustan Mills. Eight Sainiks, friends of mine were thrown out. I realised that if the organisation doesn't back you up all the time then the same thing will happen to all of us. The case went on for 2 years.

I was still in Modern Mills. I started becoming active in the RMMS. I told the *Shakha Pramukh*, Nigade about it and he gave permission. Sena did not have a textile union then. I wrote in my RMMS form that I belonged to the Sena. They did not object. In the evenings I would go to the *Shakha* and participate in its activities. We would solve domestic problems, say due to alcohol, things like that. We would advice them, try and resolve it amicably. If not then we would slap the chap around a bit and the problem would get solved. Then there would be cases of harassment on the road or at work; we would investigate, under the guidance of the *Shakha Pramukh*, then we would act. That's how the organisation grew. There was not so much of terror tactics then as there is now. There was some sincerity and honesty among the *shakha* Pramukhs and Vibhag Pramukhs. In those days, even if we stole a truck full of grain, we distributed it amongst the people. For instance in 1972, when Sena took up the issue of rising prices, there was shortage and hoarding, so we hijacked the lorries taking grain for the hotels, and sold it at the *shakha* at 2 rupees a kilo to people. But we could not distribute all the grain. So we handed the lorry over to the police.

Later things were different. The Mazgaon *shakha* was set up by Bhujbal on the basis of large scale extortion from the local liquor traders. The complaint went up to the Commissioner the Bhujbal was harassing people. Most of the old Sainiks have left and become domesticated.

I left all this after 1974.