

Tara Bhargava Korlekar Reddy (Prominent leader of labour and National Federation of Indian Women)

A short biographical note on Tara Reddy interviewed by Anil Rajimwale and Krishna Jha on July 1, 2003 in Mumbai)

I was born on January 27, 1926. My parents came from middle class and my father was a lawyer. From mother's side I am original Mumbaikars. My mother was first matriculate from Dadar area of Mumbai. My grandfather was the centre of culture and progress in the area and even in the household, the women were given freedom and equality. My father's grandfather was the chief of Korlekar fort on the west coastal side of Arabian sea in Kolaba and fought against the Portugese when they attacked the fort and was killed.

Thus the spirit of social responsibility was inherited by all the members in the family. Since childhood, I was taught that I must serve the society at all costs. I was never restrained by my parents in my activities. My father came under the influence of Gandhiji's call to leave the cities and return to villages and left the practice to go to his ancestral home in a village. I stayed there upto my primary education and then was sent to Bombay for high school in 1939.

In 1939 the war had started and the whole country was electrified. Congress decided to oppose it by individual satyagraha. First was Vinoba Bhave and second was Jawahar Lal Nehru. Alongwith my friends I decided to protest in our own way and 50-60 girls from school joined the protesters for which we were all punished in the school.

I had already studied about the patriots like Bhagat Singh and others by then. I had also started reading Marxist literature bought by my father. I joined All India Students Federation but did not agree with their People's war line. Alongwith my friends, I attacked and captured several AISF offices in the city.

In the war period, I was arrested as political prisoner and was in jail for several months in 1942 and again in 1943. After release from jail, I went to Thane to work among the tribals who were then led by Godavari Parulekar. First conference of the tribals was organised in 1944 at Tithwada in Kalyan but was soon externed from Thane and the tribal area. It was also a period of peasants' upsurge and entire area was covered by the agitators. In Thane a movement was launched against bonded labour system and then their right to have land. Again I was externed and sent to Bombay.

After my return to Bombay, I joined Girni Kamgar union of textile workers. It was a period when Royal Indian Navy sailors went on strike. The last and final uprising was never supported by the Congress and the Communists alone stood for them with support of the entire working class in Bombay. Workers and the communists fought on the streets against the army intervention and 350 comrades lost their lives. Kamal Dhonde was one among them.

The RIN revolt started with three flags on the leading battleship called Talwar. These were of Congress, Muslim League and the Communist Party but Gandhiji and Jinnah retraced their steps. Rebel sailors were supported by communists alone. It was at this moment, that I decided to join the communist party.

In fact Bombay working class has a tradition of political struggles right from the strike organised against the arrest of Bal Gangadhar Tilak when he wrote an exciting piece in his newspaper "Kesari". In 1939 again when the individual satyagraha was launched and national leaders were arrested, the workers went on strike. It was internationally first political strike against war that continued for six days. It was the Girni Kamgar Union under the communists that led the agitation.

The workers were the first teachers for me who taught me class consciousness. Even as late as in 1980, when the struggle for bonus was launched by them, defying the 144, the workers used to meet everyday. More than 64 mills were on strike. Among them women constituted a substantial part. Each morning they used to picket at the factory gate at 5 o'clock in the morning and never used to go home till late at night.

I was involved in Sanyukta Maharashtra Movement and also Goa Liberation struggle. I was also a corporator in the Municipal Corporation of Bombay. I organised the bidi workers too among whom women were in majority in Girgaon and Khetwadi, organising strikes for high wages. Women were always less paid than men and they agitated against that. I was instrumental in organising state level and then all India level conference held at Bhandara. I am also involved in Gram Panchayat unions where I am invited to organise.

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