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Purushottam Narayan Samant popularly known as Dada Samant

A **short biographical note** on Dada Samant interviewed by Krishna Jha on June 23, 2003 in Mumbai

I am elder brother of Datta Samant and look after the union organised by late Dr Datta Samant. I was born in a village called Deobagh on the sea shore in Simhadurg district on 16 December, 1929. Our village house is still there. My father was a farmer. I was in the village primary school in the beginning and then sent to Vengurla for high school studies. I joined Siddhartha College in Bombay for further studies and did my graduation with chemistry honours.

I joined Western Railways and also the Employees Union there. I was general secretary for the Bombay division in 1953 to 1960. Later I was victimised in 1963 strike and lost my job. However I was not unprepared for it as I had joined railways through union only. I was in Praja Socialist Party (PSP). After victimisation I started working in a union at Balsad.

I soon shifted to Bombay and joined a textile mill as supervisor. I got textile processing diploma also while working and later became head of my department in Gwalior Rayon Mills where I worked for further 11 years.

In 1981 when my younger brother Dr Dutta Samant organised textile workers, I left my job and joined him. As a person from the management of companies like those of Tata, Birla and Jalan, I knew the intricacies of their policies. I exposed each one of the textile mills in my interviews in the newspapers during famous textile mill strike launched by Dutta Samant.

I exposed Hindustan Transmission company that was meant to supply copper wire. I had organised union there and the management agreed to our demands of huge bonus and salary hike as they were getting copper through their import license and were earning a lot. Same was the case of Sohan Lal Kilachand who was a cotton magnet and opened his textile units in order to get import license and buy Egyptian cotton which was again sold with large amount of profit.

Kilachand had employed the brother of the then minister's brother as general manager and got the orders for defence cloth. It was easy for him to import Egyptian and other varieties of precious cotton and sell in the market with great profit. For him paying the workers better salaries for no work was necessary investment.

I have union in the Bombay state transport buses also. Out of 30000 workers, there are 10000 members in my union. In the textiles, I have unions but since Mumbai units are dismantled, workers have also joined elsewhere. I have units among hospital workers, Crompton and Greaves company.

I am worried about the transformations in the industrial sector and hence the labour too. The composition of labour has changed alongwith the treatment they get. There are 50000 workers suffering in Girni Kamgar Union alone.

The Central Government has given tax exemption for hand processing units where it is done physically by hand but workers are paid poorly and entire sector has become unorganised. In Surat, Bhiwandi, Sholapur, lakhs of workers are doing four shifts a day on subsistence wages and on contract without any right to get organised. On the other hand there are highly educated workers employed with higher wages and apathetic to unions.

I have followed the general practice today of organising internal unions and have several units functioning.

My unions have no political barriers and Congress as well as Shiv Sena have both their representatives in the leadership.

I am organising cooperatives for workers.

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Dada has followed the pattern and gone for internal unions that has become the practice of the day.

Dada said that his union has no political barriers and Congress as well as Shiv Sena have both their representatives in the leadership.

Dada is also engaged in organising cooperatives for workers.