

Bio-Note

A. M. Gopu (Tamil Nadu)

He was born on 1 July 1930 in a family of middle traders. His father was in turnery business, mostly with Muslim traders.

Gopu came into student movement through a speaking competition. The first conf, of Madras Students' Federation in Trichy in 1944 invited speakers in a competition. Gopu hopped the competitions. And that is how he came into political activism. He had the opportunity to meet with several important student leaders like Satpal Dang, Manickam, Narasaiah and other.

Gopu first worked in Kisan Movement in Thanjavur district. He was later, in 1957, given charge of T.U. work, in 1957. People like Kalyanasundaram, Nambiar and others trained him. Gopu was active in motor union, port and dock, cycles, Buckingham Ciruatic Mills, etc. He began his activities with the handloom weavers in Thanjavur, where more than one lakh of them were there, mostly from Sanrashtoa. Besides, he worked among the cigar –making workers. He was an important leader of the Tamil Nadu Bidi, Cigar and Tobacco workers' Federation. He was its first general secretary. He also worked among the hotel workers, motor workers, etc.

He was one of the organisers of the Motor Workers' Union. He began with Swami transports in Thanjavur with 200 buses and 1000 works.

Handloom works conducted mass strikes hunger strikes, 'rasta roko', etc. There was a long strike in 1959 for 45 days. In 1959 itself took place a 'long march' of 600 kms to Madras because there was no work for them. Its result was the formation of coops in the silk-weaving sector. AITUC was the first organisation in the coop sector and Gopu was one of the organisers.

A.M. Gopu participated in one of the most memorable movements, that is of standard Motors, which also produced chains, cycles etc (TI Cycles). He went on fast into death, which continued for 9 days. There was severe repression with lathi charges etc in which Gopu was seriously injured. It was followed by a city bandh.

A. M. Gopu at present is the president of Tamil Nadu AITUC.

A. M. Gopu—(AITUC, Tamil Nadu)

Transcriptive Note

(The interview was conducted on 11 March 2005 in the state CPI HQ in Chennai at 2 PM. Gopu was very responsive and ready to reply, also because he understood the importance of the work being done. The place was very conducive to the detailed question – answers and recordings. It was conducted by Anil Rajimwale).

My date of birth is 1 July 1930. I was born to a family of middle traders with strong links to the Muslim traders. Among them was the later president of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUMU), Qaide – Milfat Ismail Saheb, who was a close friend of our family.

It was one of the orating competitions that introduced me to politics. The AISF of Madras conducted its first conf in Trichy in 1944, and on the occasion, announced holding of an oratory competition. I read it in papers, applied, participated in it and stood first. During the conf I came in contact for the first time with the prominent leaders of the student movement like Satpal Dang, Manickam, Narasaiah and others.

I thus gradually was drawn into active politics. I first worked in peasant movement, not trade union. In the course of it, during the U. G. days of 1947-48, myself and my colleagues were shot at key the police in one of the hideouts. Three of my colleagues were killed on the spot. I got a bullet in my right hand, which is still lodged there, and thus barely escaped being killed.

I began my T.U. work in 1959 among the silk weavers of Thanjavur, the overwhelming number of whom come from Saurashtra. They organised and participated in several memorable strikes and other kinds of movements.

In this connection, it would be interesting to note the method adopted in this strike when a strike is announced, the union asks them to hand over their shuttles, so that no one carries on work. Are of them are owners of them looms.

As such, they have distinct problems. They should get sufficient orders and work and wages. They have been struggling to protect themselves from mill and powerloom sectors. The movement was able to get dhotis and sarees and a few other items reserved for handloom sector. So there is reservations for handloom industry.

AITUC was the first to organise coops of the handloom weavers.

I worked in various T.T. organisations eg. Hotel, catering, cigar, tobacco, bidi, cycles, trans, B & C mills, etc. I became an active leader of the Tamil Nadu Bidi, Cigar and Tobacco workers' Federation. I became one of the secretaries of state TUC in 1960.

The a day hunger strike and agitation of standard motors, TI Cycles etc was an important one. [Intervention - by M. S. Dawood: it was 9 day hunger strike; it was "fast unto death," ('yes, yes') then say that] That was in 1964. There were lathicharges etc. [Dawood and T. R. S. Mani – In fact, Gopu got severely beaten up and injured. He was in hospital. There was severe attack by the police.]

[TRS – I still have got with me those blood-stained clothes]. Then there was a city bandh in solidarity, it was complete.