



Recorded on 9 March 2023

Transcript of interview

00:00

Har zor zulum ki tukkar mein Har taan hamara naara hai Har zor zulum ki tukkar mein Rang dhars hamara naara hai Har zor zulum ki tukkar mein Har taan hamara naara hai Comrade, today's, we are just for the record, we noting the date. Today is 9th March 2023.

00:22

This is the first interview we are doing in this series, we are hoping to cover many of the leaders, activists of the CITU to capture both individual histories, organizational as well as struggles. Now I know it's very ambitious, but we will see what we can do. Yes. Okay, well and we thought who better than to start with this initiative. So first we would like to

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Just get a few details about your early life, where you were born, when, what you remember as the influences in your early life. See, I was born in June 1947. Though in my records it is March 1947. I was born in a family of...

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In what way my father was a person who was involved in the early political life. But all these things were not known to me almost till his death. I knew that he was active politically at one point of time because mother had told me. But details were not known to me. But my political initiation is because one is from the childhood reading

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I was born in Kandur. And so I was reading papers, Desha Bhimani, every day morning, whether rice is there or not in the house, paper will be there. That way from day one, when I start reading, reading that happened. And that village, Papini Sheri or Kalyasheri, those villages are party bases, United Party.

02:19

centers of huge struggles. With a very old communist history. That way, that part is there. And so all that and with the worker, my father in the later period was a handloom worker. Though we are not traditional weavers, but for his work he took up that in his early days. And so that way

02:46

And my area was handloom workers, biddy workers, their struggle, rally, procession, like that we are growing up. And so naturally that political initiation and coming into political activities, thinking about politics, all this helped me from my childhood, I can say.

03:06

So Comrade, when you were born in 1947, you would have heard about the freedom struggle and the left movement. Yes. So what I was asking was that 47 is a very critical year. And a lot of children who were born, they known as, you know, all sorts of things, Midnight's Children, Freedom's Child. But in your case, it is both.

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the wider national movement as well as the specific stream of the left history. How do you think it has... Actually, I can remember from 1957 onwards. is the thing. 57 election, I still have fresh in my mind. Okay. In Canada. in the Legislative Assembly is...

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the legendary KPR Gopal, the man who came out of gallows. His life story is titled Malayalam like that. And the parliament member was AKG himself. And so these two leaders and the result, formation of a new government,

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All that creating very big enthusiasm and sort of an upsurge in my area. at that time I was in the upper primary school. And so that is what I remember. And I have heard while growing about the terror that was unleashed in 1948-49.

04:59

in the village there. And the great Murala, KPR Gopalan for that case only he was to be hanged. And he came out of gallows. And so that happened in one part of the village where the procession started, Kicheri. It is between Papin Sheri, my residence in Leriya and my school, Kalyacheri High School. And so that way, all those I have heard, even my grandmother used to tell

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When we were staying in one place, the next house was a party comrade, how police came, raided the... But at that time I was not knowing, my father's house was also raided, that was in Charakkal, Puzhadi, little away. But that was not known to me at that time. But all these stories, and so naturally by 1957, the election results and all that, that created a big impact.

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And by 1959 I shifted to the high school. When all the turbulence begins. Yeah, turbulence. And so it is 59-60 I entered the high school, 9th standard. 9th, 10th and 11th up to 1962 March I am in the high school. And so when the, this was that so called liberation struggle against the Kerala government was happening.

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My school was an exception, Kalyascheri Government High School. At that time it was Kalyascheri Government High School. Now it is KPR Gopalan Memorial Higher Secondary School. And so that school was an exception. Exception means? Exception means everywhere the students and congress people are mobilizing the students and asking them to boycott classes, struggles. Okay, against the government. Against the government. And so naturally some people came to our house, our school.

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I still remember and students and people there, they actually chased them away. And the first procession for me in my political life is on 31st July when, 1959, when the government was dismissed. Protesting against that from the school, we went into a procession.

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That was 1959 was the first... Before that, yes, Independence Day in our area, even primary school, we used to have national flags in hands and hold August 15th, 14th November, Naru's birthday. All these we will have procession on the road. Even as a primary school student, we have done that. In the high school, when Meenobaji came, the upper primary school.

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came to Kerala on his Bhudan movement. had gone in procession to receive him and he stayed in our camp, was in our school, RONUP school. That was up to 8th standard. So 59th is high school.

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Actually my involvement that way, I cannot say it is a political involvement but we all went. You get carried along with the political... Total, total thing. And by 60, Student Federation was active in the school. I was not an active leader or activist you can say. But I was a member and I used to participate in that. Friday we have a long lunch hour.

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because it was Muslim students who were going to prayer and all that. And that day only the Student Federation meeting will be held. And so we used to attend those meetings. That was the beginning.

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So Comrade, one is this whole and this was obviously a very intensely political time. Yeah. Okay. And especially or specifically in the context of Kerala. Yeah. But in Kerala when we read about Kerala, when we study more, the other aspect is both the left movement as well as the initiation of social reforms etc. Yes. Which would have impacted the

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family also, workers, you know? Surely that had a... Because what I remember is our family, my maternal side, it is completely a conservative line-up. Okay. And that way politically none at that period from the maternal side

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from my grandmothers, other sisters and all that. There are people not connected with, I don't want to go into that, not connected with anyway left. And so in school also, among my relatives and all that, cousins, all are pro-Congress people.

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because they found that it is their responsibility to support Congress because they are from that family heritage. But I was a different thing. socially also, we are supposed to be from the so-called upper caste. And in around my house, it is backward community people and Muslims who are there.

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If you take about 10-15 houses around the place where we were staying. Actually we stayed about, till my high school I stayed in 5 houses. Because it is rental. That way. Different, different houses. But that area, few houses of the forward community people. And some of them are that way, this way related to my maternal side. And all others are from...

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backward communities and considerable number of Muslim families and all these are my friends with whom we go to school and all that. But in the house I have seen in the early days that the backward community people will not be allowed to take water from the well. My grandmother will not agree and it was broken when I was in sixth or seventh.

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When there was a marriage in the nearby house, next house, where they don't have a well and generally they used to take water crossing the road to the other side. so for a marriage in that house, naturally for cooking, it is not women's job on that day. It is men's job. And so they can't go over to the other side and bring. They came to our house, my grandmother was not there.

11:49

And my father was there. They asked him. It was my mother's house. Grandmother and my mother and mother's sister, we are all staying together. My father was also there. After 52, he was staying in our house only.

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And so he permitted because he doesn't... He never had that. He is attending every marriage everywhere, whether it is Muslim, whether it is backward community like that. He had a very good relationship with all the people. So he permitted. They removed this boundary thing, what we call as fencing. And they were taking water. My grandmother came in the evening from her sister's house.

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asked Janaki who permitted this? He his father. So there ended it. Next day, that is important, next day, I still remember, next day when women were going after the marriage, going to the other side of the road, my grandmother herself told them, yesterday you were taking water from here.

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Why today? And till they had a well, later they rebuilt their house, they were using our well. That initial period, that was there. And so we never felt, and my father was moving with everybody, and we used to go to every house and Muslim houses were very friendly, they used to give something to eat and they will always tell me.

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My friend's mother will tell me, don't tell your grandmother. That was the... So for me, not only the political, the social issues, all these started entering into my mind from these things. And all the friends actually were close to me are from these communities.

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And those who are so called from my community, they don't keep in touch with me because I am there from the school, high school, up to high school it's okay. There was no difference. High school is student federation, student union, congress, communist, this comes up. And so the division divided is complete. School leader election is there. I work for them. And one election when I was in the 10th standard, second year in high school.

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One of my cousins was the candidate on the other side and this side was M.T. Dibagran who later became editor of JNU CPI's paper. So that way that big divide. So all these helped me in my earlier period. And immediately after my SSLC, even before the results were out, with all this in mind, I reached Chennai. Okay.

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1962 in search of a job. Okay. And what sort of a job were you looking for? Yes. And so that was the thing. My maternal uncle was there in Chennai. He was working as a supervisor in the metal box company of India Limited. And so he was actually helping me for my school studies. With all the sufferings at that time I had to pay 6 rupees as...

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Because I am from a far-ward community, I had to pay Rs. as fees. School. And I never paid Rs. on the actual date. With foreign asks. 25 paise fine only. I have paid almost all the months. Because that will be money order will come from my grandmother, from my uncle. And in that Rs. will be for me.

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That way all the help was from him. so immediately after my SSLC, he said, you come here. But I had just crossed 15.

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And so my data for those changed to make me cross that 15 when I finished my SSLC. 11 years SSLC. So coming back, coming to Chennai with this sort of a political feeling, but then he said 15 years, what job you can get at least up to you have to cross 16. And so he put me in a college for PUC for one year.

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Nearby college by walking I will go about 2 and half kilometers in Chennai. I completed my PUC. Even before the results were out I wrote the exam for apprenticeship in Ashoka Island. And I joined as an apprentice under the Apprentices Act of 1961.

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So when you say apprenticeship it means it's like a technical or it's a clerical? It is technical. It is under the apprenticeship act, the factories, about 30 people in one batch.

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Act came in 1961 and Ashok Leyland started recruiting apprentices who are fresh school final exams. So this is Leyland which is making trucks and all those. that was one of the highest paying

concerns in Chennai at that time. And so, 62 July, 62 June my results came. By that time my exam, this written exam was over. I had an interview.

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and that interview was over and I got 63 July, 9th July 1963 I entered the factory as an apprentice and my trade was given different groups were trained and I was a machinist. I was a machinist, I was trained and our training program involves five days in the factory, one day in the ITI

18:07

for our theoretical classes one day off. So Monday will be ITI. Monday is the factory's holiday, weekly holiday. At that time for power supply they have different holidays for different factories. My factory has had Monday holiday. So that Monday will be for me the classes in ITI. Sunday will be a holiday for me. That was three years. After three years you write the exams

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And if you pass the exam, then there will be specialization for two years, is semi-skilled wages, you are not regularized. And then after that, you are appointed as a skilled B grade operator. That was the training course. But

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The whole thing got many ups and downs during that period. By the time I completed my training, 66, then the whole economy at that time was in a big crisis. And so factory vehicles were not moving. And another additional problem was that they were to get some...

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crucial spares from England, England, British Ireland. Especially the chassis have to come from there. And so in that also there were some supply problems.

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and vehicles were also not moving. Our economy, you will remember by 1966-67 was in difficulty. That's when they had the... Yes, shortage, the recession, many other things and 67 elections, the whole political up-sert in the country, that comes later. And so by 66, this had happened. And so we were told, we have spent lakhs on you.

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It was British management at that time, British-Indian collaboration. We had a works manager, Hoyle from Australia. He called us and said, we have spent a lot of money on you, training. We don't want to send you out at this point of time. But you continue here, work for us, getting the stipend. My stipend at that time was first year Rs. 65, second year Rs. 80, third year Rs. 95.

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Even after completion and passing the exam, I could have got about Rs. 2,800 at that time. We were involved in production and asked to work and even during shift also we were working. But we were paid Rs.

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With that 95 I was involved in production. My training period is over. And so that went for two years. Okay. Okay. And the so called trade improvership which was to be given from the third year started after five years. And so up to seven years, seven years, four months, I was not regularised. After that regularisation,

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It was in 1971 and 1972, another phase of my life where I got dismissed. So how did you get, I mean, tell me. You know, before that, one big political thing is when I reached Chennai, that's 62-63 is the period.

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Actually what was happening within the Communist Party and all that, I was not a member, I was not close, only reading papers. What was happening inside was not known to all of us.

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struggle within the communist movement that was happening was not known to a 15 year old boy what does I know? This is also the China War. Yeah, China War is one thing and within the party this ideological struggle and all that I had no idea. But I still remember the KSF, Kerala Student Federation Conference just before my SSLC exam. That district conference was held in my school. In that

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District leaders, state leaders are speaking in a language which we were actually not able to understand. They were fighting against each other, I could understand. Some of us. We were discussing among ourselves. What is happening? One leader is saying this leadership is useless and they are not saving us. We are under attack. At that time, Talichery and all that, the socialists were attacking our comrades.

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Praja Socialist group. so, inter-literary, PR group and all others. And so that reflected in the conference. Some big speeches and suddenly one person took out a small knife and said, these leaders are not saving our life, only this can save. We could not, we were discussing within ourselves, we were supposed to be delegates in the conference. We were not understanding what is happening. With that I came to Chennai, you know.

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Chennai when I came, different and also there is no chance of speaking, language also is a problem. Not able to speak but what you are seeing is Chennai Municipal Corporation elections are happening. At that time Congress, Communist party and a split away from DMK led by EVK Sambat.

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That was known as Tamil Desi Katchi, Tamil National Party. E.V.K Sampath was Periyar's brother's son. And so he was number two in the party, DMK. He came out. And he formed a small party. Small party I later understand. These three flags were on the electric poles and all that. And my area where I was living at that time, my uncle was living.

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that area had a CPI councillor earlier and he was contesting again. area, earlier that area was represented in the assembly in 1962 by Jeevanandam himself, feminist candidate. That area, industrial workers, harbour workers, all are staying in Chennai, North Chennai. And so this candidate was a CPI candidate.

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He was a tailor known to my uncle. And so my uncle was telling, he's a good person. But I could not understand Congress flag and communist flag together. It was a big shock to me. Because my political thing is as a boy, young boy, communist party fighting Congress. Who is the enemy? Congress is the enemy. That is the political understanding we have.

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And so with this, I am shocked and not able to understand, not able to speak. There was a saloon there, barber shop. And so he, I used to try to understand and talk. Then he was telling me that within Communist Party also there are differences and all that.

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Some people are fighting against this and some of them are supporting a candidate in another division where a trade union leader is contesting and some of the communist leaders are supporting him and Devvam problem and that happened. Later on we understood it is S. Krishnamurthy who was a leader of AITC and who was later not a party man always but a fellow traveler that way all his life. was

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CITU leader also later. Later on, was a communal rotation in mayorship of Chennai. So there has to be a Brahmin. So DMK did not have a Brahmin. And this comrade who contested as an independent, Yash Krishnamurthy, who was supported by a section of the Communist Party, that is what he was telling. Later on I understood what it is.

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after few times but at that time he became mayor of Chennai. And there was a clause saying that there was a communal rotation at one point of time. Okay.

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There was a one time, it will be one year like that. direct election. So there was a communal rotation. There has to be a one time it is Brahmin, then non-Brahmin, then reserve thing like that. That went later on. And so that way I could understand that there was something. So when did you become

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That actually during these college days, June to April, I was trying to learn Tamil and talk to people but very difficult. You can't speak in English, can't speak, don't know Tamil also. That was a struggle and so I had some take a half hour, I should learn the language.

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And so by about 3-4 months being in college and talking to people, I started picking up. Then at that time, China...

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And the college one day they said we will all march to the state secretariat, a big procession. From college we all walked to the secretariat and Chief Minister Bhaktavaraj Shalem addressed the students in front of the secretariat building. that. So this process after coming out of college and then joining factory

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I picked up the language and started reading, started understanding things in a better way, discussing with many people. By 1963-64 when the party split was almost completely finalized and Thanali plenum

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After that there was a reporting by Comrade Sundaraya in Chennai, Kerala Samajam Hall. That was the first general body for me to attend. Along with three, four others, I went there, attended

that meeting where Comrade Sundaraya reported. Though I could not actually follow fully what he was telling, but yes.

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Already, in my mind I am a communist. Whether party agrees, others agree or not because that was the way I grew up. And then 64 and immediately after that, the arrest, leaders were, many leaders were arrested and we had some local contacts only, we used to meet and discuss. Then came the 1965 Kerala election. At that time we had a grouping there in the late night.

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we will sit in front of a comrades tea stall and Desha Vimani on many days it will be brought by a hotel worker Sukuna and he used to circulate after 64. Earlier Desha Vimani was their united party then there was a break then after it took over Desha Vimani was involved in the election work.

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In that constituency, the president of Ashok Lalit Employees Union against whom there was big complaint. He was an HMS leader, S.C.C. Antony Pillai. So he was the congress candidate. And Anjali Manoharan, one of the senior leaders of DMK, was the candidate of DMK. And for the Legislative Assembly also, M.R. Kannan was the candidate of DMK.

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and the Congress had a candidate Ram Das. And so this election, I got fully involved. Campaign work. By that time I started speaking in the street corner meetings also by 67. What happened was, we were working in shift. Three shifts. Though they were paying me only 95 rupees, I was working in three shifts.

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7.30 to 4, 4 to 12.30 and midnight shift is 12.30 in the night to morning 7.30. And that shift if I ask for the other worker to adjust, they will give that. And so for election for 6 weeks, I did this 12.30 to 7.30 shift.

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And day time I will be, 7.30 I will be leaving the factory. For night only then at that time workers had that company bus because it is midnight by 11.45 in my area the bus will come. And so almost all days I will be in the street wasting posters or writing on the wall and all that. And DMK people were many, they were majority in the factory also.

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They used to be very fond of me because I am working for them, like anything. Six weeks, midnight shift. So my uncle got furious over this. And even before the elections were over, he called me and said, now you have to decide whether you stay here and desist from doing all this or you have to take your...

32:05

Without thinking anything actually I just told him on first I think it was April first I shift Just like that it was a spot reaction on which I have thought later on many occasions that was a he also did not expect it He was only trying to control me, but I decided to break my impulse

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And I just shifted near to the factory with two others who were working with me. My first batch apprentices, 63 January batch and I was July batch. I went with them in their room. So that was early and my father and others, they were not knowing about all these things.

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They were expecting that yes, after training and all that they will be getting something, some support from me. That is the question. And 71 only I told you I could get the semi-skilled wage. 70.

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But not as a regular. But at that time my salary was 3600 rupees. Which is? Too high a salary. Quite a bit. Quite a big salary.

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Last salary I got was 3600. But as a regular worker, I could work only for 10 months. After that, dismissed? Dismissed. But before that, two years, I got semi-skilled wage. At that time, could support my family, during that two years and two months and this 10 months. Three years, what all I could do. One sister was married.

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I could send home a good amount of money at that time comparatively and my expenses was only going for the meetings, going that way and buying books and papers. I used to buy Indian Express, Deshaar Manithi, Khazir People's Democracy, all these. So, Comrade, when this division was happening also,

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And you all had meetings where you said Sundaraya came and he had this. So then were there smaller meetings there? Yes. 65. Yes. Because who were our district leaders, I was not familiar with all of them, only names we had, they were all in jail. Yes. Comrade Parameshwaran, Comrade Hari Bhatt, all these leaders, they were in jail. But once they came out,

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Then they started organizing. There were lot of meetings. Factory level units were formed, factory sympathizers. In my area, up to 67, where I was staying, we formed party units. So the impact of the split and that division would have been felt all the way down? Yes. In the union also? No, union it was not...

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The union is completely different, that I will come later. Because here this party was where my residential area and some contacts were there within the factory and that also giving them people's democracy because I could get all the papers here where I was staying. And by 66 onwards I am a party member, party unit meetings are held, general bodies are held and before 68th party congress, 8th party congress,

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in Kochin. So the local area committees were being formed. And so I was elected to the town committee. At that time it was known as town any intermediary committee that was known as a town committee at that time, Thiruvathur town committee where the industry, it is a industrial bank, where my factory also. Thiruvathur, Ennore, two areas together.

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a committee was formed and I was taken as a town committee member in 1968 before the Kuchin Party Congress. So, Komri, tell us a little bit about who were, where did the party get its members in terms of, you know, also a little bit about the class because there may have been workers, there would have been others. I'll tell you that. But actually,

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There are two things I would like to say. One is from 65 onwards, the people who were there in the area up to 67 where I was staying, it was some midi workers. In that initial unit we did not have other than one worker who was in the harbour, Chennai harbour. Other than that we did not have any industrial worker in that unit.

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We had two-three Malayalis. Two of them, one was having a tea shop, the other was working in a tea shop. And we had two BD workers. And another one was a corporation, Chennai Corporation worker. He was a lorry driver, where this waste was being taken.

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for that lorry driver, like that. Only after 1967-68 we started getting members in that area and by that time the industrial units also. Because how that happened is the actual political history. 67 election, as we all know, was something of very important political development in India.

38:19

Congress losing power in 8 states and Tamil Nadu was won. So, elections in Tamil Nadu and the defeat of Congress and to defeat that the widest unity of political opponents of Congress was possible in Chennai. DMK was leading and even Sotandhra party and DMK had an understanding. DMK had an understanding with CPM.

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CPI was with, they were voting Congress and independently contesting that way, they were telling. But, Soudhantra party and communist party were fighting in the election day. At that time, that was also there.

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in one constituency, CPM was contesting against Sodhandra. Sodhandra was always seen as representing the... Right extreme, Rajagopalajari himself is the leader. And so, all this was understood at that time. Yes, we are having our understanding only with DMK.

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and not with Sudhandra but to because Sudhandra party and CPI are fighting against each other also. That way that combination, the election and the result. And it's also the first election where CPI and CPI are on different sides. Yeah, except to the 1965 Kerala election. After that the general election.

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But by that time Kerala situation has changed. CPI were together. Bengal it was two groupings. CPM led group and the other group CPI and Congress separately it was a triangular contest in 67 and 69. 69 together, first 67. But they joined the government. CPI joined government in UP, Punjab also.

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with the Chandra party, various others, Lok Dal and all that. 67 election in the North is a very critical election also because the first time Congress loses in UP and take Yes, UP, Punjab, Rajasthan, Orissa and Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Congress which got defeated in Tamil Nadu in 1967 has not come back to power till today in 2023.

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Though at different times they had understanding with DMK, understanding with Congress, were not... DMK and ADMK never had any coalition government. And so after 1967 it is either DMK or ADMK after 1977. Like that. And so here, this... 67 election, on the national level, the crisis in 67...

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and the 67 election, the upsurge of people against Congress and all that and the communist party split but the trade union struggles in different states all that were happening on one side. In Tamil Nadu people had very big expectation from DMK after the Congress was defeated.

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And what actually was the experience immediately after the new government came to power? Srinanda Adurai was the Chief Minister, as you remember, and then she died in 68 and in Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister. By that time, the peasantry, mainly the agricultural workers, Tanjavur,

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Yes. Went money in 1968. And in onwards, different industrial units in different parts of Tamil Nadu started raising their demands. Because till 1967, whenever the workers... there were huge struggles before 1967 also.

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But every time the government let loose terror, arrest and support to the management and many of the trade unions were also, INTUC and others, were also supportive of the employers and the government together. And so with this change in government and their slogans, the poor slogans,

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Because one big thing was, one was rice shortage was there. so the rice campaign... shortage in is well was actually ship to mouth existence. Used to be PL 480 coming from America and ship to mouth existence. to mouth was changed to all those. So 67 election, all that was the campaign. Food shortage. so the powerful campaign and all.

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that and DMK slogan was for one rupee they will give one measure, Orupadi, one measure of rice and one rupee three measures of rice is the target. Okay. Moonupadi letchiyam, Orupadi nichiyam, surely one measure but and that till today is that rice politics.

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Till today, the free rice even now what we are seeing in Tamil Nadu, this is a continuation of the 1967 political slogan. Because nobody could damage that. Okay, one rupee it is not there but one rupee continued. Free rice system continues in different forms. And so at that time, one other slogan other than the rice was, let us see God.

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in the smile of the poor. That way all the pro-poor slogans and against Congress big speeches and progressive.

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Congress at this time is led by? This is the Kamaraj? Kamaraj had come out. Kamaraj came out and Bhaktavatsalam was the Chief Minister before 67 and he got defeated. And Kamaraj also was defeated by a student leader in Birudhunagar, his own area. So Congress was uprooted. And so this, actually people felt this is the opportune time to raise their demands.

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Comrade, just to, because I mean in 67 I am also still very young, although I am more familiar with the northern situation because it keeps getting repeated in our minds also. But I am just trying to understand what you are saying is, A, there was this social economic, the economic crisis was very serious. Secondly, this crisis gets reflected in the political formations and the content.

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Contesting power. Exactly. Also that in a sense there is also a crisis within the Congress party also. Yes, later on. After 67 elections the crisis within Congress starts. Yes, and the crisis within the left is already... Already there.

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Already, already there. 62 onwards, is... 62, 64 party formation, 67... And so, the approach to Congress was one of the biggest points. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Though it was limited to the corporation election in Chennai, that was the political understanding. Be with the Congress and attack DMK like anything.

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And in Tamil Nadu, another point was from 65 onwards, the third or fourth phase of the anti-Hindi agitation. 65 big student movement. And our comrades are already in jail.

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and this DMK people they were arrested and put in jail during the language struggle anti-Hindi agitation. In the jail also, CPF people and DMK people were there in jail together. so all that in 1967 that defeating, fighting the Congress all these came together. Comrade, just for the record because you know now it is just politically

46:55

it is being presented as an anti-Hindi stance and of course it is also being seen as anti-national by certain forces today. But how was the agitation, how was it discussed, how was it envisaged, meaning what was the

47:17

basis of the opposition that it the Tamil identity or the diversity of the language How did the people? Actually it is not 65 alone even before independence. Yes, the Imposition or demanding that Hindi be taught in school as a compulsory language and all that had started Yes, pre-independence. Yes, the debate is on and actually the self-respect

47:47

movement or the Dravid Akkadam that way the even before DMK was formed it had started, Periyar had led that and after that in 65 it was that 15 years of the Constitution after that the that guarantee was up to 65. Then after 62 Nehru had given an assurance

48:12

that as long as the people demand, English will remain also language. again 65, by that time, 65, they wanted this Hindi and Hindi, it was seen as an imposition of Hindi.

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making it compulsory study and imposition of Hindi. Against that, that was an upsurge among the students.

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and big struggles. In my area actually, one day they stopped the GT express and there was a firing. Many places, even emulations, people burned themselves. All this was happening. And so all this added to 1967 election time. Language, economy, everything together.

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feeling against Congress as an organization responsible for all the crisis. But what happened was after that historic win for DMK and its allies.

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and DMK government was formed. Within months these people started raising their voice and the government was not heading towards and by 68, 2-3 firings took place. One in Arubangadu, Nilgiris, in Naiveli, Thiruvathur, North Madras, Vatmai area, Vimko, Match Factory.

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And so why 68 these struggles? Because the workers, see the union leadership was also imposed on the workers. They were not free to change the leaders. The democratic functioning of the organizations were also not there. And the economic demands also were pending.

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And so all these together people started searching for somebody who can lead them and different individuals or movements and people came to the field. And some of the pro-left or pro-CPM advocates and others they came into the field, party actually deputed them. All the known trade union leaders are in IIT UC.

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Yes. We had only, in Coimbatore we had, CPM had known trade union leaders. In Chennai at that time, those who were actually, in Chennai, Comrade B.P. Chintan, he was actually a state leader of the party and he was mainly working in, he contested the election also in Nagapatnam only, 67th parliament. That was the only parliament constituency we lost. We contested 5 and 1-4. Okay.

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And so that was the, then after 67 election he was shifted to Chennai.

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and party was being and individual leaders, Kuchelor, Godan Ram and like that lawyers and all that politically active. were, party was indirectly in touch and asking them to take the lead. So Kuchelor was working with the construction workers. Kuchelor? Kuchelor, no. He was not in construction. He was an industrial worker leader later. He was a practicing advocate.

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just came, new advocate. He was in contact with party and the party actually started deputing him to different areas like that and later on he shifted his allegiance to ML that way very close to them. That was another story. But overall in Chennai surrounding industrial belt

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where the largest industrial units are existing. in textile industry in Coimbatore and other areas, sugar factories in Tiruchi and surrounding areas, cement factories.

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that also mainly in Tiruchi, Salem, wherever cement factories are there. Plantation workers in Nilgiri, all these and then Tiruvanveli belt. So all these centres, these workers started raising their voice. And government was not listening to that.

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and government fully, whole governmental machinery actually the experience is that it started behaving in the pre-67 habits actually. People were furious. And so, 67 to 71, 72 or up to almost emergency, 75, it was a period of big absurd

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in different parts of the country and especially for us in Tamil Nadu and Chennai that was the period without exception. In Chennai that whole industrial belt, 67 to 70, 75 only TVS group was exception. Even the TI group, Tube Industries, Chetiar Group.

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One or two factories had struggles at that time.

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So TVS was? TVS, was what you call as in house trade union. Though INTUC is in the leadership. That changed in 1977. also big upsurge came and big straddle started. before that,

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It was a struggle in different parts and almost all the factors. can still remember from the northern end, EID Pari to the city in the north belt. So this would have thrown up a new leadership also? came, Comrade Chintan became a very well known leader. Though he was leading trade unions in 40s, early 40s.

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In 1946, he was one of the leaders who organized workers in support of the R.I. and Mutiny in Chennai. After that, 1947-48, RS 1050, United Party leadership and all that, was working as a state secretary, working in different areas, mainly Ramanathapuram, Thanjavur, Nagapatnam, like that.

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time, new leadership came. And after 68-69 Comrade Maithili Shivaraman came into the trade union movement. She was involved in four or five trade unions as Vice President, as President. Vice President took Kuchelar also in metal box, in union carbide, like that. And so with Kuchelar we were working till almost up to 70 push and pull, but working together.

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up to 75 then we had a big break. So, comrade just to then come back also and also bring in the CITU because this period of 60s CITU is not.

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in existence. these big struggles are happening and the leadership is emerging. Then actually, historically these great leaders what they did has to be thought of. Because 67, not only in Chennai and Tamil Nadu this was happening. Bengal was...

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burning that way. Gharau, that this and United Front Government, Jyoti Basu as the Home Minister will not intervene and Kerala 67 government. when the 1968 government employees struggled, here must be declaring, Indira Gandhi sending central reserve police to the states.

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for one day strike, 68 September. One day strike, the Central Police was sent to the states and EMS declared not a single policeman will come out of the barracks. I still remember he used the word barracks. They will not come out of the barracks. Only under the instruction from the state government. And he refused to arrest.

57:11

the leaders of the Central Trade Union, the Central Government employees despite the instruction from the Centre. But in Tamil Nadu what was happening? Central Government leaders were being arrested even before the strike started. It was a one day strike. And so this, we were all using this. See, see this. After 67 there were changes in government in Bengal, in Kerala and Tamil Nadu but what is Tamil Nadu doing?

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Because by 1969 the relationship between CPM and DMK was formally ended. Because all these struggles were happening and I think it was 1969 February or something. Wenmanee and all that, Pudukottai party state committee meeting. I was only area committee, town committee member but I still remember it was that. And so that...

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If you take the national level, this 67 after 67 observes an attitude of the AIUTUC's official leadership to these struggles. If you read the correspondence between Dange and Ramamurthy,

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where he says, am writing this on behalf of those congressmen who are in AITUC and also in CPM. He was the spokesperson or the person who wrote letters after letters, criticizing their position and asking them to demand and hold democratic process. Their ideological, political position and attitude towards congress and attitude towards struggles. Various struggles were happening.

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and the government was coming out with various proposals.

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See comrade why I am asking this is because you see sometimes what happens is in the mind of the common person it looks as if oh so CPI CPM split therefore the union also split you know you have to form your own union and that is also carried to the women. But the fact that it was difficult to conduct struggles that the leadership was not

59:38

playing the role that a political leadership of the Union has to play in the midst of these struggles. Even before 64 by 62 and actually when the dispute with China and things started, they advised the workers, now it is in defense of the country. From that onwards. And 64 the party split.

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But the position officially and continuously that was taken by the leaders was that we want unity and trade union should function as a democratic organization and all the proposals were like that. But what was happening was, Comrade Dhanke and others at the other end who was in the leadership of it, you see, they were taking a position that these are anti-nationals like that.

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and struggled and all the changes various wage boards were policy changes various wage boards were being presented rationalization without tears automation all those coming in different sectors

oil sector, coal sector, even public sector all those things were happening at that time these differences were getting intensified and at one point of time up

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In 1969 only, finally a decision is taken that we have to find a way out. Actually I remember, as I was working in the factory, though I was not a regular worker, 68 onwards, party considered me as a regular worker for all other purposes. And there was a state level convention of Tamilnaga Tozhichanga Maanadi.

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Tamil Nadu Trade Union Conference. That was held in Coimbatore by the people who are with us in unions. Though we may not be in the leadership like me where I was working. I am not a regular worker but I was active in the trade union among the workers. I was also asked to attend that conference.

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That Coimbatore conference, I still remember it was in the GD Naidu's hall there in Coimbatore. At that, the decision was we will be working within it, you see. We will be striving for unity, but at the same time fighting against the...

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undemocratic attitudes because by that time ATUC leadership has started you are not following the directive from the organization you are disaffiliated like that unions were getting disaffiliated and then they were preparing for the All India Conference also I think it was in Gundur or somewhere and SS Mirage care was vacillating this way that way all these things were there but

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For people like me, it was very clear that our effort is to maintain unity within the organization, but the official leadership of ITU was not agreed.

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So different states, different things were happening. In Tamil Nadu also in different areas, in Coimbatore, in Tirunelveli, in Madurai, even in Chennai Transport Union, they were doing that. Disaffiliating unions or not allowing the real union and imposing leaders or forming new unions. Many, many undemocratic things were happening. And finally in 1969,

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It was almost end. think Goa working committee, I don't remember, it was in Goa, the working committee members of AITUC who were against this leadership's position. They met and they decided to call an All India Trade Union Conference. That 1975. And for me, I still, it's a pride occasion, it was a pride occasion for me to be present in that foundation conference of CITU in 1970.

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though I was not a regular worker even at that time. But I was able to attend that because I was representing that industrial belt in North Chennai. And so that way, the formation of CITU itself, in my opinion or in my experience, it was a fight back on the policy issues.

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against the wrong policies and that was very clear later. But at that time

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But we are telling parties, two parties and so they formed but it took six years. Almost six years to see IT was formed. And even in that, if you read the concluding address of Comrade BTR, it is ringing still because after that so many occasions we have been talking about it and it's still there.

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in the concluding after the new organization was formed.

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He spoke, yes for all these days, past few days we have been critical of the leadership of ITC, you have been doing that, have been speaking against them, their activities. Leave everything here and go back with a clarion call for unity. And that is where that slogan unity and struggle.

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was given in the concluding address of that conference, the All India Trade Union Conference.

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Because there were some suggestions, naming the new organisation, it should be AITC only. Name it All India Trade Union Conference. We have called it All India Trade Union Conference. Name it as AITC. See, different, different suggestions were there. Finally, it was actually a democratic process, I could understand. It was not somebody decided somewhere. It was suggestions after suggestions, in writing, in speeches, what would be the name? Different, different things and what should be the flag?

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Finally that CITU, Hammer and Sequel, all that which is there for the last 52-53 years with us came out of the discussion, the naming of the organization. And so here that unity called

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and that reverberated all over the country. If you look into the pages of the developments in 1970-71 like that, we can see that call of unite unity and struggle and here is a new organization which will lead the working class upholding the class struggle. President and General Secretary who were elected

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He, Comrade P.R. submitted the report and presided over by B.T.R. and they were elected President and General Secretary. Both their reports and the other report presented by Comrade Pandey, what was our experience in different states? Why we had decided to call this conference? P.R. also in his report said that and all the various state experience.

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And that way, that called actually the formation of CITU to me and factually it is also that it is a product of the struggle in the 60s. The compromising, ideological compromise, the political compromise and the compromising the workers' interests in the 60s, when workers were in a mood to fight,

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The leadership of AIT at that time was taking a position on various counts supporting the government. It started with strengthening the Nehru's hands in 1962, then Indira Gandhi, then all this and there was a big movement.

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So Comrade, coming to the 70s, broadly 70s we would see in two parts, I mean pre-emergency and post-emergency is a very big division, both for trade union because I think while the political crisis and Indira Gandhi and the whole Allahabad judgment and all is what is highlighted, as students what we saw, by that time I was in my MA in 73.

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What we saw is that from 72, 73 onwards there were big strikes and struggles. mean the railway strike of course was one of them. And I remember I think one was this wage freeze. The whole question of wage freeze I remember. That was during emergency. Yes. So that also... I thought in 74, in February 74... Before that, actually after 67. Yes. And 69 the...

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fight within Congress, Syndicate Indicate and suddenly 71 elections and back nationalization, the abolishment of the Priti Peers and the left position being taken by Indira Gandhi and Garibi Hatao, the big slogan, all together

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and what was then described as the Indira wave. And that resulted. That resulted in a big unheard of victory in the 1971 elections. post, I mean the whole Bangladesh. Yes, everything together. And in Tamil Nadu,

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because I am mainly concentrated on the developments in Tamil Nadu part in this discussion. part, DMK which was in the forefront all through their life and 67 defeating Congress coming to power, suddenly when 71, Indira Gandhi decided to dissolve the parliament and go for election.

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Suddenly, Karnanidhi also decided to dissolve the Tamil Nadu Assembly and go for an election with Indira Congress as an ally. On the other side was Kamaraj, Congress O, because it was Congress GO and Congress J for some time, Jagjeev Vandana.

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and then Indira Congress, Congress organisation. so there actually Kamaraj was the opposition thing and Sudhadra party all together stood against Indira Gandhi and that alliance was there. And in Tamil Nadu, CPI Congress all together joined together. And in that we...

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CPM and in continuing this struggle we took a position both indicate and syndicate are a curse to India Indicate and syndicate are India it was a rhyming slogan. It was a curse and so that, Amaradu it was that way. At that time

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See, politically also, when there is a correct political position, even if you don't get elected in the assembly or even if you lose all your deposits, the spirit of the workers and cadres of the organization to fight, that was seen in 1971.

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I still have that in my mind.

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Because 71 election and defeat in no way affected the functioning or the spirit and struggle of the workers. Because what started in 1967-68 onwards continued after 71 also. And it took a very intensified form in 1972.

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where actually in Chennai and various other parts the struggle, DMK started intervening directly in the trade unions, Simpson group of companies. Simpson group of companies where actually the union by law had no communists will be able to join the union. The by law had a clause. Aravangad Raman was once president and Guru Murthy, his disciple was continuing.

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and in the background of the various struggles there also it erupted.

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against Gurumurthy. With the support of government, a DMK leader was foisting on the workers as leader. Against that, the struggle started for the democratic functioning of the union like that. That was the spirit in different other struggles also. But there, then Comrade Chintan, Kuchelar and almost all together,

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It was supported by all others except DMK, DMK on one side, all others at a later stage, even the IIT UC, even some IIT UC leaders, because IIT UC and Guru Murthy always had some struggle, some IIT UC leaders, they were also in that support of that struggle. And it was during that struggle, Comrade Chintan was almost killed.

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He was stabbed inside a bus in July 1973. That is another chapter, unforgettable days for us. What I am telling is, 71 elections almost everywhere, Indira Gandhi, Indira Wave, everything happened and Karunanidhi also. Karunanidhi entered into an agreement, they gave some parliament seats to Indira Gandhi. Not a single seat in the assembly.

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She agreed because she wanted that parliament to be safe. Not a single seat he, Karunanidhi, gave Congress to contest. Only parliament. And it was a sweep.

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71 and so immediately after formation of let us confined to that CITU apart and struggles 70 formation in different parts of the country this absurd which was already there from 67 onwards

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got a shape and formation of CITU enthused the workers in a big way and CITU leadership who was there already in the field not in the name of CITU but leading many struggles there came CITU and CITU support to the struggles. In different parts

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The unity called... We tried to look at it from another end because I think you started with that because it is also about the manner and nature and the direction in which Indian capitalism is sort of moving. After all the trade union struggles are emerging from that conflict.

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which is also finding reflection in the political crisis in the capitalist system. And if I remember, we always used to say that the pre-emergency phase saw probably some of the highest record of

mandates lost in terms of strikes. So if you could link it up in that context also that the need of a new leadership in the

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Exactly, Actually that is the thing. From 1967 onwards this was happening. And ATUZ was not doing what was expected of that.

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At INTUC or leadership like HMS, within HMS also that fight was going on, socialists. On one side George Fernandez and others, the other side they established leaders of HMS and he formed HMKP and all that and within the railway also after 70, 71, 72 like that things were happening. This actually our effort was the call for

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unity and struggle within a few months of formation of CITU we took efforts, our leadership took efforts to form a joint platform which was at that time known as UCTU, United Council of Trade Unions. But with us, a group of, a split away group of HMS

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and I think some of these RSP elements were also there. am not exactly sure, we have to check up. Then, insurance employees, there also the struggle was happening within that union and within the central government movement and postal movement also the struggle was there, going on. But, postal unions, insurance union,

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and a section of central government employees movement, they were there. Because they were all struggling from 60.

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central government strike, 68 September, one day strike, seven or eight people killed including in Delhi, Indira Prastha and various other things. And so this struggle, all together by 70, the situation was ripe and CITU was formed and it continued actually and this

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CITU, CITU, CITU and CITU called for solidarity. Actually, even today I can say there is some lack of that spirit from my experience, I can say that. But at that time it was, whoever is on struggle.

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CIT will be there. That was the call from Calcutta. It is worker, it is working class, we are for the class. Under whose leadership they are on struggle is not our question. You go and be with them. That way, whether it be whatever the colour of the workers flag which is on strike, this leadership, that is what you said, search of new leadership. That came and there are studies.

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See, I think, I don't remember exactly who wrote it. That article was there in Social Scientist also. A study by a woman researcher, I don't remember the name. In a circus tent, Karnataka, somewhere, there was some problem.

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and the workers resisted, they actually struck work on their own. And there was a dispute and all that. Then somebody, faint memory, am just saying this, I read it later, social scientist article, and there the policeman telling this circus artist,

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There is a head-load work-house office in that town, somewhere in Karnataka, where the trade union movement is not that strong. You go to them, they will support you.

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Everywhere, because my experience is that at that time who is leading that struggle is not a question. Worker is on struggle, you are there. That spirit was developed.

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and various sections going on struggled and various issues, demands, policy changes, attacks on the workers, as you said, the wage reduction, public sector, various other things and that devaluation of rupee and its impact, the life is in difficulty and so workers coming out. At that time, that question of bonus for all.

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in the government employees movement picked up and railway, they change in the leadership of AIRF and he getting elected. And so by that time, this before that, UCTU was formed. And how actually that spirit we can see, government intervened to form a counter to that joint platform in the name of NCTU.

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National Council of Trade Unions. We are United Council of Trade Unions and against that in NCTU a joint platform was formed and who inaugurated? R. K. Kadilkar, the Labour Minister inaugurated, he attended the convention of NCTU where INTU, CITU, CITU and various others were there. And so NCTU on one side, UCTU on the other side, this started.

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this united movement and the call from Calcutta to unity and struggle and that took different forms and this united platform was built. And then as you said the Allahabad High Court judgment, the crisis within Congress and the impact of that thing and the struggle by JP and others.

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everywhere and this sudden imposition of emergency it is all part of the history and all records are there I need not go from my memory into that but that

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I told you earlier by 67 or 69 or 70 or 71 election in Tamil Nadu experience the CPM or the CITU leaders getting defeated in the election that no way makes any difference in the spirit of the people to go on struggle and 72, 73 VP Shindon attack another C Govindarajan another leader was attacked he was also stabbed

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like that and various developments were taking place. All these things are there and at the national level, international level, all the developments together resulting in the declaration of emergency. don't know. But during that emergency period also, with all the repression, we could continue the struggle.

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Ladies were arrested.

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But one good thing, because I told you about 71 election and DMK's attitude, but we have to go on record that when the emergency was declared, by that time the relationship between DMK and Congress had worsened and he, Karnanidhi, started writing against emergency and the first six months of emergency, Kaminarudu was an oasis.

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a green patch where we could open our mouth. Almost all leaders

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who were not underground or who were not arrested. They were all there in Tamil Nadu. EMS came, AKG came, Samarmukherji came.

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others were arrested, BTR and others have gone underground.

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and for six months till 31st January 1976, the day the DMK government was dismissed.

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Till that time, six months, we were free to do and campaign against emergency.

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Karnanidhi himself came on the road and started distributing handwills protesting against emergency. He used to write everyday letters to his followers, that is his tradition. Everyday in their daily, there will be a to his brother-in-law. He used to write. There he used to write in different way.

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indicating that who are all arrested, who have been later on. But in different parts of the country what is happening? Or sometimes very sarcastically. And the famous speech in the assembly which was actually published in lakhs and lakhs, volume cademum, sword and the shield, it was translated in English also, printed and circulated in large numbers. Officially the government printed it.

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because it is Chief Minister's speech. Lacks it was circulated. We sent it to different parts of the country at that time. At that time the relationship with DMK came because of this struggle. That's six months. And our leaders came and openly said that, yes, here is the way to open our mouth freely without hesitation, you have to come to Tamil Nadu.

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like that. And so that was a different thing. But all over the country. But overall impact was by that time, after emergency what happened in other states of South India, Tamil Nadu also it was like that. They won the election. Many things happened. 73 MGR went out. He was out and out again, pro-emergency and all that.

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There are different experiences that is not relevant here because he was out and out supporter of emergency because Karnanidhi is opposing it. And basically also their attitude towards democracy and democratic rights and struggle are completely different. Though they are a regional party

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Whether it is DMK or ADMK, basically it is a Bhuriswara party, led by the regional Bhuriswara, we will say, but their attitude in general, at different occasions, different positions, now they are taking a very good position against Hindutva. That was there till 1967, but in 1971 it changed. And in between, DMK went with BJP.

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So comrade, keeping in mind that we will have a time pressure. I can go on. No, no, no. Because I wanted to concentrate on the past. What happened after 75, 80 is now well No, no, it's not well known, comrade. So in fact, I am going to suggest we do one more session when you are here next if it can be done in this trip. If it can be done in this trip.

01:29:14

we will try, but what I wanted to do was to bring it up a little bit closer to the neoliberal, you know, so that we also see the shifts, see the shifts both in the trade union movement, the consciousness of the workers, what happens through all this and also that the nature of industrialization which has then changed because 70s when we were still students, we were

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hearing more about public sector strikes, know, whole BHEL, all those, PR was talking and writing about BHEL, Siemens, all those. So there are also political issues in terms of attitude and approach to collaborations with... Attitude to MNCs. Exactly. Exactly.

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Not only Siemens, even Coca Cola. Absolutely. Our George Bernard 77. Yes. So I was thinking if we can talk a little bit about that and how through this maze of political alliances and break up, how does the struggle of the working class in a sense

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Continue? I mean it has to, both the leadership and the organization from top to level, they are constantly under attack. Continuously under And we could successfully, we will go into details as you said later, but I will conclude this with just saying that yes, after emergency,

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Before that was UCTU, NCTU and all that. After emergency, Morarji government brought IR bill. Industrial Relations Bill. And that Delhi rally here against IR bill. And in that even ATUC had to come.

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I think there was this big symposium in convention in Talcatora. that ground where after that we could not go. Big rally. In that actually when LTC leaders stood up there was protest from workers. PR took the mic and he said today the agenda is the fight.

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I remember, we were there. Yes, that was something which happened. And so from there onwards, every step, the call, what I will again and again insist is the call from CITU Foundation Conference reverberated all over, it continued through emergency, even emergency, during emergency various struggles and after 77,

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We fought against Indira Gandhi and played a role somewhere bringing this new government. But when they came out with Industrial Relations Bill, fought against it and from then onwards,

continuously, whatever is the political things that are happening, in 1980, the National Campaign Committee was formed.

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And from 1980 to 1982, the first All India strike where the issues of the workers and the peasants and agricultural workers was a joint thing. And 19th January, 1982 strike and after that, 82 strike, 84 strike and various strikes and movements all over the country.

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leading to 91, neoliberalism and the struggle against neoliberalism that continues. And as you said the changes in the industrial sector and various other changes, the earlier situation, what happened in Mumbai,

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whole textile industry disappeared Delhi also it disappeared Coimbatore also it has disappeared it has gone into the unorganized forms and into different rural areas like that they change and one thing you said yes we will surely we can discuss that

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the attitude or the approach of the trade unions or the attitude of the workers towards these changes. Yes. It is a big question that requires a complete in-depth study where we can only say some personal views but actually a detailed study is required. After 1991

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is happening. the drastic changes both in industry and the working class then. Industry, working class, attitude of workers, the type of struggles that are developing. We are now saying yes, it is a defensive struggle. How it became a defensive struggle, how we are not able to make it an offensive struggle.

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or what is what we are lacking today, it's a question. So comrade what I am suggesting is we do a second session. On another day. We will do it. We will do it. But I will end with one question which rocks the mind of the average student, average citizen.

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that in India today and it is not today but it has been happening now for more than 20 years we said neoliberalism but 9192 is also the big fundamental divide of fundamentalism you know from the 80s we saw in Delhi the anti-sex

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Yes, 84. So, we have seen that from 84 onwards and then the Mandal Commission. The question that comes up in the mind of the non-worker sort of person who looks at the movement is, how has the movement

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faced these challenges, how have these challenges affected because you are saying unity in struggle but what we are seeing is there is no unity of the citizen today. know the citizen is being devised. Yes, actually yes I will also conclude by just saying one or two sentences on that. Unity in struggle of the working class

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that got the struggle that got intensified actually by end of 80s and the beginning of 90s there is a change.

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Actually the neoliberalism, though we say that Tarasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh brought it in July 1991, actually the second half of 1980 itself has started that.

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That memorandum of understanding or the acceptance of the conditionalities in IMF which came out later through some journalists and others and all that. All these details and the changes they were imposing on the people, livelihood of the people and they started and slowly slowly it became the situation today. And in that as you said different questions arises from that.

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social, political, communal, everything together. Every aspect of the lives in India has been affected.

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and this part actually, it will be what I was trying to say all through is officially my experience what I saw or what I experienced, what I felt is correct and what I also did my little way contributed to that but this question where we are today

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that I think it will be different perceptions for different people and I think we can surely have a discussion on that sometime if not a very exhaustive one but actually how there are two things one is how this unity and struggle was carried over and big united movements took place against

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the neoliberal policies when a considerable number of leaders of the trade union movement in the country openly declared at one point of time there is no alternative than to accept this. It was openly said. But we challenged it, continued it. Even today after 31-32 years we are able to say at least that the trade union movement is opposed to that. But within that

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there are lot of things that are covered up by that single statement the trade union movement is, we have to discuss that. So, linked to that just one aspect I would like you because this we may not be able to cover when we have, you see along with the workers struggles the question that we always face in social movements is a progressive social outlook where

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caste is involved, we all know that recruitment patterns in textile mills were often along caste lines, you know which department had which caste workers, those and there is a sort of consciousness both in terms of pollution, in terms of intermixing. Now Tamil Nadu of course has had a totally different history on debate on but undercurrent...

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In my opinion, remained even at that time and even today it remains. In different forms. You see, the question that we ask ourselves as people with a progressive social outlook is that we are there both for the struggles and the strikes and the events, but also how working class consciousness is being shaped. Because that will influence the...

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Yes, it has influence and it has one word if you want, I will say it has weakened.

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Why? Why has it... That why requires a lot of in-depth assessment and analysis and the answer to that is needed for us for the further the correct answer.

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is needed or correct analysis is required to understand and to intervene. That's what I'm telling. That is required to intervene. That I think we are in that process and whatever way we, I can as an individual say, actually on the other side, we are also thinking of finding an answer to that. Yes. In what way?

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We will be talking to people like you to help us. to assess this? that is the question. Because you see, for me even as a student of labour history, know, mean, know, CITU has also been part of the labour history project, especially CITU in Tamil Nadu. The question that arises is,

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One is the everyday trajectory of events, struggles and you know, but the other is how does the working class intervene in the trajectory of social development and intervene.

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on behalf of social change when it is already under attack. It's under attack and it is under attack. In one way if you, one word again I am repeating this one word thing but if you say that our intervention on the economic policy matters whatever little are there that was there but that much of intervention in the social

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on the social issues and related activities were not there.

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Just, yes, because there may be so many reasons, but the fact remains what we did on the economic policy issues at least to give an impression to the general public and the workers as a whole that these policies are against the interest of the toiling masses. That much of thing

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we could not impress upon the masses that the social oppression and the social divide is creating havoc in the united struggle of workers.

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In 1984, only in Delhi, Indira Gandhi's murder and after that the immediate reaction in many of the public sector townships. I still remember, BTR said, till the other day they were all together and suddenly this anti-sick

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And industrial centres like Kanpur. Not only Kanpur, many industrial centres, our townships. The neighbour attacking, till yesterday they were calling each other, the children were calling them each uncle, brother, cousin, like that. And they were under attack. And so that poison that is there, and from 1984 to 2023,

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actually the word of the overarching influence of the communal ideology.

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and the social divide on the other side is also getting deeper. Which is also a strategy of capitalism. Yes. I mean it keeps the people divided. Keep them divided. Keep them divided.

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and we have not been able to do what all is required in that is the personal feeling that

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I think whatever you do please prepare specific questions on what you want and whatever I can do from 80-84 onwards till today whatever I feel as out of this experience of 50 years. And then we will also get, because we never asked you what happened to your life. mean you became a, you had, after all you had other aspects of life other than your

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Yes, But after all, see that is the thing. The struggle which developed in Chennai and surrounding areas, I was also part of that in 1972, I got dismissed along with my more than 100 colleagues. What was the struggle about? That was the struggle of Beijing race. In a so called way. And then naturally,

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It's a part of the struggle all over and the increase. We have got a new leader, Kuchelar as our president and we thought that yes, now it is time. Though I was not a regular worker at that time, even not regularised. I did not have in my life an opportunity to be a leader of the or only a member. When I became regularised,

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I became a member of the Union. Then the struggle started. I was involved. I never could vote in a Union election as a worker. Because I became a member, then the Union was already there, leadership was there. When we went on struggle, I got dismissed. I got dismissed only for the activities I have been doing from 67 onwards. That is the fact. That one day I will tell you how actually it developed.

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That was there. In 72 September I got dismissed, 72 December I am a whole timer. And since then you have been... 50 years completed. Out of my 75 years... to the family? What about the family? Family? They suffered. My mother and sister. Only one good thing that happened to my family is that my younger sister got a job there. And that too with the courtesy of her colleague.

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She went for interview and my sister was also called for interview in Keltron, near to our house there. And that girl told the interviewer, the person who is sitting outside has got more mass than me and she wants a job and if you are giving a job, you please give it to her.

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and she got a job and not through any other source. She got a job, she fed my parents and later on when she got married also, kept my mother, father died in between. Mother was with her till the last moment. She died only two years ago at the age of 98.

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I could take care of them only for 3 years.

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And how did you get married? That was part of the life, party life. I married my wife, daughter of our district secretary. District secretary initially, then later on, central committee member, P.R. Parmasharaj. His daughter.

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Somebody suggested, okay, your age is going on. So how did family survive? She works? She worked. She is the person who built the family.

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My son and daughter educated them, all that built a house, all that she did. She was aided school and so that way she still gets comparatively good pension. As a clerk, she was a clerk in a school, aided school. She's a graduate. From 78 she worked for about 30 years.

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She was typing, writing accounts and all that, severe pain and all that. Before retirement, 4 or 5 years she came out. She has taken care of that and my sister has taken care of that and I have done what I have to do for the last 50 years. Well, that's always a very difficult decision. the problem... Yes, because see there was no thinking about what...

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When I told my uncle I am quitting, I am getting out of the house or when I decided to be a whole timer. Because of getting dismissed from a worker factory, is no use and that too when you are dismissed. Just for, on a well known, everybody knows the person who gave witness, my superintendent, he was so fond of me when I was working in the department.

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And when I was lying with typhoid during that struggle, he sent his clerk to my house to find out what actually is his position. Because he got news that I am very severely affected by typhoid and many other reasons I had no food, no proper food and all that. But that same person came and gave evidence in the inquiry, domestic inquiry.

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that I saw Padmanabhan standing on the table of the works manager with a paperweight in his hands.

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That was, and I got dismissed. I retired in sessions, then chose the enquiry officer along with more than 100 days. And so then immediately party said, yes, it's better what you will do. Comrade Chintan asked me, Comrade Parveshwar asked me, he was the district secretary, what you are going to do now? I said, okay.

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In 72 September, 72 December 6th, that was 6th December, 1972, I was asked to join the Hotel Workers Union. I started that.

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72 to 79 in the district, 79 to 2010 in the state center, 2010 onwards here in BTR.

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That is personal, that is. But yes, that satisfaction of being part of all these developments and with moving with all these stalwarts of Indian movement. Personally, my best part is not all this. I could move with all these comrades because from 70 onwards, I was translating the speeches of

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Though I was suffering in 60s to learn Tamil, from 1970 I started translating these speeches of the leaders. Till up to 2010 I did it. And travelled along with them whenever they come to Tamilnadu for almost 30-35 years. I travelled with all these leaders.

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and all of them closely I could understand whether it is BTR, it is EMS or early for a few times compared with AKG except for Madhav Skurtan because there was no chance because he never comes for public meeting and PR is part of us and then the Bandchakra Vartu he had all the leaders

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That is something, moving with them, be with them.

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for translating and also helping them in their travel. You did more than translation. You were thinking for the movement. Part of the job. so in that way, I got that opportunity to be with these people, these great leaders, and that gave some more confidence in doing my job.

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That is the thing. Well, also experience, such vast experience. Still, see, from 1982 onwards I am in the All India Committee.

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vast experience of... attending the working committee meetings, general council meetings where BTR, Comrade Samar Mukherjee and all these leaders and in Tamil Nadu working with Comrade Manath, Ravani, Chintan, Nalasivan.

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all the stalwarts of the freedom movement, Amrit Shankaraiah, all these leaders. So this 50 years of my whole time or period is moving with all this and now the younger generation.

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So with that I can answer the questions that you wanted personally in the next session. see the personal aspect is also necessary because I think we must understand what the comrades go through. I mean, okay, I don't like to use the word sacrifice because there is no sacrifice involved actually. Actually my generation

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You cannot say that we sacrificed. No, and you have come into the movement with that... Yes, that sacrifice is of that. But even so... One day, out of this, one day I will tell you what I understood as my father's role in the earlier period. Actually the details I could get only after his death.

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One of his old colleagues who was a leader in the freedom fighters, freedom pensioners association, he wrote a letter to my mother without knowing, just Mrs. Kunjiraman, when he saw the small news in Deshaivamani about his death. Then I wrote to him.

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You are sending a condolence resolution. I wanted to meet him but I could not reach in time. We were together in those days like that you have written. Then he sent me a three page letter about what he was.

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Comrade, don't you feel that sometimes when we are in the movement, we spend so much of our life outside that we actually don't get to know the people in our own family and what? You know, it is something that you miss and you think of it later. No, he... there the problem was my father was not interested in saying that.

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I understood because my mother told me when I just grew up before I left Kerala, he told me, your father saw you only at the age of one and half years. After my birth, for one and half years, he had not seen me, so 47-48. He was part of the underground arrangement.

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and he was one of the volunteers who completed the AKG's hunger march to Chennai from Gannur as a volunteer.

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But 52, because there was nothing in this family, I was growing and all those family things, there was no man in our house. All are women, my grandmother, my mother and they divorced or left out my mother's younger sister. And so my uncle told my father, you have to be here with them.

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and he took it up, he stayed. Only after that he used to discuss politics. 65, from Dasha Bimani, I found out when I was in Chennai, he was the election committee chairperson of my village in 65 elections. Because they wanted an old hand to be there at that time. All the big people are in CPI itself. And so he was.

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That way he was a... I knew that he was a political person. He will talk, he will argue, everything. And later on we understood. Nayanar knew him, NB Raghavan knew him and all that was known to us. All his past was not known to us. If you can read Malayalam, I can give you that letter at unfortunately I can't. No, actually I wrote a few... in the corona period I wrote...

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My father remembered. Small paragraphs in English.

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Comrade, I personally feel and I saying this because this is the understanding, this is the first interview I am doing with the CITU. I have done in two rounds with comrade Pandhe but not recorded. I have notes. But what I saying is that the organization should begin to gather documents and that history. is... One of the biggest failure and continuation of

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past when we were all prescribed movements and banned organizations that practice still now continues and we are suffering. We don't have details. The reason why I decided I would push it is because I feel once I begin even if the interviews are not very comprehensive but at least then some people will...

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take it forward. It's important that the organization understands that this documentation is important because the bourgeoisie and those historians are not going to write our history. Only we can put together both memory, documents, histories of struggles. I asked Gumbel BTIR.

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other is comrade PS has written, EMS has written, AKG has written why don't you write about your life? He is usual ha ha ha he said no communist can write his autobiography

02:00:14

I had some more questions here at the tip of my tongue but I was not confident enough to ask him about that but he said that. Not only to me, he has said that to others because N. Ramakrishnan who wrote about him has said, who was in the parliamentary party here for a very long time, Shankarayya's brother, he had written that when I asked him

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Comrade Ahilya was also like that. I tried to interview her. Then finally it was like one occasion she's waiting to go to the airport. So I started just asking. So my notes from that conversation with Comrade Ahilya are like two pages here, two pages here because I didn't even come prepared with a notebook. So whatever notebook I had in my bag, I've got two pages then I've moved from something. And then she said, no, no, no, no, I have to go to the airport.

02:01:10

That's how. So our people feel it is not like a communist to talk about their life actually. is... But you have said that not only to me, different people. Yes. But I think it is important we capture because also your understanding will give us the shifts how trade union developed in terms of different...

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sectors, categories of workers. If we don't capture that, it's not only this strike and that struggle that will go on. That is part of a long history. But for the organization to reflect on its own history, it is important to also look at it with a more reflective... Okay, thank you so much.