

# **Workers Resisting the Onslaught of Exploiting Managements on their Constitutional Rights as well as Birth Rights**

In the history of workers' movement of independent India, the All-India Railway strike 1974 and its experiences and the confrontation of Maruti Suzuki workers at Manesar plant in 2012 and the consequent worker's conditions and experiences are two turning points to be studied in depth and draw necessary and useful lessons for revitalizing and reviving the present day movement of workers languishing in a sorry state of ineffectiveness and lethargy.

There are glaring similarities in the All-India Railway strike 1974 and the confrontation of Maruti Suzuki workers during their resistance to the management in 2012. While the Indira Gandhi government which was supposed to be a model employer of a so-called welfare state had stubbornly refused to regularize the services of casual workers and make them permanent according to the law, the Suzuki management with its so-called corporate culture had fiercely refused to regularize the services of temporary and contract workers who are made instrumental for the entire productivity of Suzuki. Contract workers are a significant portion of Suzuki's total workforce who fulfil the production targets.

The Govt. of India under the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi had brutally crushed the All India Railway Strike-1974, by unleashing untold police repression on the striking workers and their family members, sending police troops in to railway workers colonies and threatening the families of striking workers. It stopped the water supply and electricity supply to the workers colonies and thus intimidated them. Likewise at the behest of Maruti management, the willing state government of Haryana too deployed police contingencies in to the colonies of Maruti workers and threatened the family members of the agitating/striking workers. It cut off water supply lines and electricity and coerced them to discontinue their struggle against the ruthless exploitation of the management of the Suzuki.

In the days of the British colonial rule the disputes between the workers and managements over working conditions and the treatment of workers, were treated as a 'law and order' problem and the disputing workers were victimized through police repression, court orders, terminations etc.; while the managements that ignited the disputes through their policies of ruthless exploitation and inhuman treatment of workers were left scot-free to behave as they wished.

Even after the transfer of power in 1947, the rulers of the 'independent' India treated worker-management disputes as law and order problem, despite their rhetoric about industrial peace and worker's welfare. With such lofty slogans they placated the workers to guarantee

peaceful atmosphere to industrialists. The rulers adopted a carrot and stick policy towards the disputes and grievances of workers. Even those administrative conciliatory mechanism, labour courts and judiciary were intended to drag on the workers' disputes without sitting them for many decades, incapacitating the workers to sustain.

In the present imperialist globalized era, in order to safeguard the interests of foreign big capital, at the behest of the imperialist corporates, police force is permitted to repress workers brutally, with impunity by the state. The third-degree methods used by the police with untold vehemence and unwarranted vengeance on the terminated workers of Suzuki, Manesar plant after the violent incident of 18 April 2012, reveal how the entire ruling system and its administrative organizations are reduced in to instruments of subservience to the foreign direct capital against the workers and citizens of India, criminalizing worker's struggles and repressing them with impunity.

Even the judiciary which claims to be neutral in rendering equal justice to all became subservient to the foreign capital (FDI) and its interests can clearly be seen with regards to its treatment of workers of Maruti Suzuki, Manesar plant. Even after more than a decade the cases of the terminated workers of Maruti Suzuki are not coming for hearings at Labour Courts. Even the High Courts are delaying for decades together to hear the appeals of workers and keeping them pending infinitely. The higher courts are showing excessive zeal in granting 'stays' to the wealthy classes and capitalists against any and every order passed by the state or administration. But in the interests of workers and against the interests of industrialists, they never deem it fit to stay the illegal termination of Suzuki workers for no fault of their and the life sentence imposed on 13 workers. The comments made by a Punjab and Haryana High Court judge, while turning down a plea for bail by jailed Maruti Manesar workers in May, 2013, speaks volumes about how the judiciary too became subservient to foreign imperialist capital even at the cost of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of workers of our country. The judge said "The incident (workers' confrontation) is most unfortunate occurrence which has lowered the reputation of India in the estimation of the world. Foreign investors are not likely to invest the money in India out of fear and labour unrest". Thus he orders the labour to be subservient and servile to the foreign investments and submit and yield to its ruthless exploitation and inhuman treatment. On the other hand pursuing their cases in the courts has become a very costly affair for the workers which they cannot bear, that too when having no jobs and proper means of livelihood. This is how the system denies justice to workers in an indirect way.

Rajendra Pathak a lawyer who has been taking up the cases of Maruti workers laments that "Suzuki and the government have it all : heads they win, tails the workers lose, and if there is a little change left that too, Suzuki takes".

Sarabjit Singh, the general secretary of Maruti Suzuki workers' union, who has been sentenced life imprisonment, stated that: "Even if we had got the best lawyers, even senior lawyers, we would still have been defeated. We had to lose the case. Maruti is a very big

company. How can we compete with their resources? The management and the government were hand in glove. How can we win?"

These lamentations remind us the novel 'IRON HEEL' of Jack London, in which in the episode of Jackson's arm, the lawyer who lost his case for compensation against the company laments "I am a loser even by birth. (Because he is born in lower middle class). The lawyer of the company had all resources. Moreover the judge who conducted the trial in the case is a member of the club in which the company lawyer too is a member. Both of them play tennis in the club..." explaining that the capitalist class would not allow the workers getting justice and winning their cases. The very ruling system does not at all allow workers to fight against the big capital against its inhuman exploitation. A lesson is to be learnt by the working class and their movement.

The Maruti workers had to fight for a very long time to register a union and organize it. Whenever they attempted to register their union, the concerned governmental authorities created hurdles and the Suzuki management victimized the workers who attempted to form into a union by terminating them from their jobs. Today forming a union in any private industry has become an impossible task to workers. Now even the trade union act is codified making it very difficult to workers to form a union to collectively bargain with the managements. The struggle of Maruti workers for time and again to form a union exposes our system how it refuses workers to enjoy the constitutionally guaranteed right to form their association and how the successive governments in subservience of foreign capital have deprived the worker of their constitutional rights.

The attitude of political parties towards the struggles of workers too is exposed by the Maruti Suzuki of Manesar plant. Those parties too are on the side of the big capital helping it to further its interests. While the ruling BJP is committed to support the foreign corporations at the cost of Indian citizen and workers, the Congress party which boasts to be the party of common people and claims to be not a party of the rich unlike BJP, too had shown utter indifference to the plight of the struggling Maruti workers. According to Yadavendra Sharma, a worker of Maruti Suzuki, who spent 5 years in jail for the crime that he did not commit states that when Maruti workers had tried to contact Sonia Gandhi through contacts with Sheila Dikshit in June 2013, Sonia Gandhi told them that "she could not help those in jail because they have done wrong, they have destroyed property worth of crores of rupees and that she cannot talk to 'guilty' people accused of murder."

This attitude of Sonia Gandhi once again reminds us Jack London's IRON HEEL novel. In the novel – Jackson the skilled worker loses his arm while attempting to save machinery from destruction; as his arm fell in the machine and was crushed. As he was utterly tired of doing his work due to fatigue he could not act with required speed. But he was removed from service on the cause that he was negligent and lost his arm. He lost his case for compensation. At that time the wife of the company (factory) owner was running a philanthropic and charitable foundation to help the destitute. When Jackson approached for help from the foundation, the lady refuses to give any help to Jack who lost his arm,

stating that she would not encourage 'negligence' and of workers performing duty negligently. Sonia Gandhi's attitude was likewise, with capitalist class nature. Supporting the big capital than the beaten workers in distress.

Even the traditional big central trade unions reacted similarly stating that they would stand by 'innocent workers' implying that Maruti workers were 'guilty' of violence and vandalism. Such an attitude reflects even in the statement of Amarjeet Kaur, general secretary of AITUC, in the interview dated 06-03-2020. She said that ".... He (Sonu Gujjar, leader of Maruti Suzuki Employees Union) did not adopt a process of slowly and gradually intensifying the struggle. He would not go step by step. If the struggle is intensified step by step the pressure on the management also increases. What these people used to do is to go on a flash strike. If something unwanted happens they would suddenly then and there stop working in the factory and start a sit down strike..."

Any one who is conversant with the worker's movement at Maruti Suzuki Ltd know that from 1986 onwards the workers have been following the so-called procedure of advancing and intensifying the pressure on the management as enunciated by Amarjit Kour. But it did not yield any positive result. On the other hand it is the 'flash strikes' and sit down strikes without giving prior notices as stipulated by the law to which Amarjit Kour objects and opposes and thus insinuating the Maruti workers as violent not abiding the law. This is the same attitude of all the established traditional central trade unions towards the militancy of workers in conducting their agitations depending on the specific conditions existing at the time and the attitude of the management. These trade union leadership is entrenched in legalism besides becoming bureaucratic, running their unions/federations without trade union democracy. Their political parties make decisions at the central level and impose them on the union members, without considering whether such decisions are in conformity with the opinions of the workers and their necessity at the particular situation. That is why the big central trade unions too reacted like Sonia Gandhi, imputing that the Maruti Suzuki workers resorted to violence and they cannot support them. Distancing from the real working-class politics and their practice made these traditional central unions including those claim to be left oriented, have made their leadership the birds of the same feathers of ruling class political parties.

While any militant agitation/struggle of workers against the managements is being discussed, very often academicians and others, talk about the connection between workers unions and political parties and the well-wishers of workers advise sagely that the workers shall organize their independent unions without affiliating to any political party. This advice implies two aspects. That the workers unions shall not have outsiders as their leaders/advisers is the first implication which is in concordance with the wish of industrialists who themselves use the services of outsiders as executive directors, experts, advisors etc. in framing their policies and implementing them with regards to the affairs connected with the labour management and at the same time refuse the workers to have outsiders as their leaders, guides and advisors. Another aspect is they suggest that workers shall be a political, having no politics and political understanding about their deplorable

working and living conditions. Thus they aim indirectly try to disarm workers of knowing and understanding the class politics of their own viz the working class politics. The reality is that the present day sorry state of the workers' movement in India is due to abduction of working class politics in the name of remaining independent or taking up the politics of existing parliamentary political parties that have nothing to do with working class politics.

This is the important lesson that has to be drawn from the experiences of Maruti Suzuki struggles: workers must have politics of their own class against exploiting classes and exploiting systems i.e. anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-landlords. In our country main forces of production is agriculture and industrial. So, workers, peasants unity is inevitable. In rural scene any one can see feudal customs – religion, caste, untouchability, atrocities on Dalits, women and other poor-downtrodden sections. Unemployment and peasant migrations due to poverty are rampant. So once again we emphasize that the unity of working class and rural poor i.e. peasantry – who are engaged in farming and exploited by agri-policies of ruling governments, bureaucratic, comprador bourgeoisie inurement necessity. So the working class must organize their unions, agitations and struggles based on class politics to put an end to the ruthless exploitation to which they are being perpetually subjected to by the big industrial capital.