THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
OF GUJARAT
FROM 1919 TO 1947
AND
THE LEFTIST IDEOLOGY
CHAPTER - 5

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT OF GUJARAT FROM 1919 TO 1947 AND THE LEFTIST IDEOLOGY

It was in the year 1914, that late Smt. Anasuyabehn Sarabhai, the first President of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad, who had gone to Europe just before the First World War, returned from England and dedicated herself to work for social, moral and material uplift of the workers in general and textile workers of Ahmedabad in particular. Smt. Anasuyabehn launched educational, social and industrial activities and started a school for workers' children in 1914. Later on several night schools were opened in labour localities of so-called untouchables for imparting education to the workers with the help of some social-service-minded friends. Her work would have possibly been limited to education and social activity, had it not been for an event which put on her the responsibility of heading one of the biggest organisations of workers in the country. The Textile Labour Association however was founded by Mahatma Gandhi on 25th February 1920. This is how events unfolded themselves.
In December 1917, the warpers of the Ahmedabad textile mills numbering about 500 and mostly of middle class were agitating for an increase in their wages which was given to other workers to compensate them due to the disease of plague. They approached Anasuyabehn in order that she may lead them in their fight against the injustice done to them by the employers. Reluctantly, she agreed and managed to secure a substantial increase in their wages. This event which took place on December 4, 1917 is celebrated every year by the workers of Ahmedabad as "Majoor Din" or the Labour Day.

Injustice had been done to the weavers in Ahmedabad numbering about 10,000. The cost of living was rising at the close of the First World War. Workers were facing hardships because of the discontinuance of the plague allowance. Hence they demanded a wage-rise to meet with the rise in the cost of living. Employers were however adamant on not giving anything. Mahatma Gandhi suggested the formation of a Committee of arbitrators representing employers and employees with the then Collector as the Chairman. The millowners accepted the suggestion to become members of the Committee which was formed, but later on, their representatives withdrew from it on the plea that workers of some mills had gone on strike. Thus they declared a lock-out.
Anasuyabehn sought the help of Mahatma Gandhi who willingly offered his services. It was on this occasion that Mahatma Gandhi led a strike for 22 days with truth and non-violence as weapons and taught workers how to wage a righteous struggle. The outcome of the struggle resulted in acceptance of the principle of arbitration which enabled to solve this dispute between employers and employees in a peaceful manner.

In his book, A Righteous Struggle, Mahadev Desai relates the story of the strike conducted by Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1918. This incident gave an opportunity to Mahatma Gandhi to evolve his ideology of the trade union movement which, later on, spread at various industrial centres of the country. It was this occasion which sought and secured the services of Shri Shankerlal G. Banker, an active organiser of the Home Rule Movement of the Bombay city and later on, Honorary Secretary of All-India Spinners' Association of which Mahatma Gandhi was the President.

Shankerlal's valuable services to the Textile Labour Association have been a source of inspiration. The present-day working class movement in the form of Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) owes a lot to the efforts of these three pioneers - Mahatma Gandhi, Anasuyabehn Sarabhai and Shri Shankerlal G. Banker - along with Shri Gulzarilal Nanda and late Khandubhai K. Desai.

The hectic struggle of the period mentioned above and the one which then followed provided ground to Mahatma Gandhi for the formulation of the principles of
effective labour movement suited to the environments of this country, which consequently formed the basis for setting up the trade union organisation in Ahmedabad. He was justified in calling it a laboratory for testing his trade union techniques and methods of truth and non-violence in the field of industrial relations. The principles laid down by him have a permanent value for all who are interested in trade union work and the same have been followed more or less by the Ahmedabad workers, since then. These are:

1. The workers and their leaders should make reasonable and just demands and insist on the minimum.

2. The weapon of strike should be the last one in the armoury of the industrial workers. It should be resorted to only when all peaceful and constitutional methods of negotiations, conciliation and arbitration are exhausted. Even during the course of strike, workers should be prepared for just settlement or reference to arbitration.

3. Peaceful and non-violent behaviour even under provocation is the sine qua non of obtaining justice through any mass struggle of this type. While on strike, workers should be careful not to damage the property or injure the person of anybody. They should not bear ill-will towards the employer or their officers, as the workers have to fight the evil in the employers and not the employers personally.
4. The workers should maintain their self-respect and therefore, they should not rely on the funds raised from the public or by sympathisers for conducting a strike. A worker on strike should try to find out alternative occupation to maintain himself and his family during such period. No work should be considered low and below one's dignity.

5. A strike is a form of Satyagraha. A striker, therefore, should not succumb to hardship. Once he resolves to resort to strike, he should stick to his determination.

6. While on strike, the worker should be truthful, non-violent and courageous. He should be prepared for voluntary sacrifice and keep faith in God.

7. The worker is a co-partner of the industry and as such his responsibility to the industry and the community is great.

8. Gandhiji has enjoined on those who work for labour not to behave as if they are pleaders of workers whether their demands are right or wrong. Gandhiji believed in positive organised strength. All his instructions therefore aimed at creating such strength. His approach was to awaken in the workers, the consciousness latent in them so that by the development of his personality, he should be able to hold his own against any injustice or tyranny from the side of the employers or the state. Thus, he laid emphasis on the constructive activities which tend to eliminate the deficiencies in the workers so that they
become capable as responsible citizens in the society.

Gandhiji, therefore, called upon the Textile Labour Association to concentrate on activities like education, library and reading rooms, removal of untouchability, abstinence from drink, use of hand-spun and hand-woven Khadi, removal of indebtedness, proper use of time and wages, participation in social and economic development of the community.

Smt. Anasuyabehn addressed the warpers' meeting on 4th December, 1917. Gandhiji addressed workers on the occasion of Textile Labour Association formation under a Neem tree.

During the pre-Union period of 1914 to 1917, educational, co-operative and industrial activities were conducted among millhands by Anasuyabehn through the Majur Mitra Mandal or the Committee of Workers' Friends. This Mandal consisted of Anasuyabehn, Krishnalal Desai (alias Bachubhai), Amubhai Mehta and Kalidas Zaveri, a prominent advocate of that time.

On February 25, 1920, Gandhiji formally inaugurated the Union of throstle workers under the Neem tree in the compound of Anasuyabehn's residence at Mirzapur, Ahmedabad. This Union along with other occupational unions, developed into the present Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, as a federal structure of 12 occupational unions, with Anasuyabehn as President and Mahatma Gandhi and Shri Shankerlal Banker as the Advisers.

After the Union's formation, a demand was made both for wage-rise and reduction of hours of work from
12 to 10. Workers had to resort to strike for reduction of hours of work. This issue was settled by negotiations with the Mill owners' Association. This was an unique example in India, because at that time, the hours of work were 12 under the Indian Factories Act. The wage-rise was from 50% to 100%. It was pointed out by the Union that workers should be compensated for the rise in prices of foodgrains. The reduction in hours of work should be utilized for enrichment of their social life.

In the year 1920, it was decided to give one month's wages as bonus with three festival days for Diwali. There was appreciably improvement in the conditions of work and facilities such as drinking water, dining sheds etc.

In 1921, some of the workers demanded bonus in the middle of the year and some of the employers agreed to pay bonus monthly while some of them had refused to pay. A strike ensued in some of the mills. Even here, Mahatma Gandhi intervened and advised the workers not to insist for bonus every month. The workers ultimately realised their fault and expressed their regret. Mahatma Gandhi treated the Textile Labour Association as a laboratory of his principles of the labour movement and that is why it was kept quite aloof from the All India Trade Union Congress which was formed in the year 1921.

In 1921, the Indian National Congress resolved to collect a fund in the memory of Lokmanya Tilak, which was then known as the Tilak Swaraj Fund. In 1923, the
Ahmedabad Millowners' Association effected an arbitrary cut of 20% in the wages of workers on plea of economic depression. They even refused to approach the Arbitration Board for the issue. As against the 20% reduction in wages by the employers, the Textile Labour Association demanded a wage with a sliding scale. This proposal was rejected wholly by the employers which resulted in a general strike. This strike took place on April 10 and lasted till June 4, 1923. During the strike, relief operations on a large scale to provide work to the strikers were organised with the help of Maganlal Gandhi, the nephew of Mahatma Gandhi and his co-workers from Sabarmati Ashram on a large scale to provide work to the strikers. It was remarkable that during the long period of strike, there was law and order and peace was maintained in the city.

The events during this period inculcated the spirit of Gandhian approach—mediation and arbitration among the labour and capital. They learnt that strike and strife could be avoided through mutual negotiations and arbitrations. This led to constructive activities in the succeeding decades. Thus, during this time, a number of constructive activities were undertaken by the Union.

SECOND DECADE - 1927 to 1936

This was indeed a period of awakening. It was during this period that the workers became very conscious of their rights. They demanded restoration of the wage-cut...
of 1923 and it was partially restored in 1929. In Bombay, during the same period, the textile workers and the industry were largely affected by the strike calls given by Communist leadership. There were stoppages of work in mills, wage-cut for workers and arbitrary rationalisation. The post-1929 period was a period of economic depression of an unprecedented nature. In 1933, in the textile industry, there was a depression. The Millowners' Association put a demand for another wage-cut of 25%, which was referred to the board of Arbitration consisting of Mahatma Gandhi and Sheth Chamanlal Mangaldas. Later on, when Mahatma Gandhi was pre-occupied with major national issues, Manu Subedar, a renowned economist and expert in business management, was nominated as arbitrator on behalf of the workers.

The arbitration proceedings continued for two years. As there was no agreement between two arbitrators, the differing awards were submitted to the umpire, Justice S.S. Patkar of Bombay High Court. However, the whole dispute was at length settled amicably by the mediation of Mahatma Gandhi on January 13, 1935 at Delhi and this agreement is known as the famous Delhi-agreement. Under the Agreement, the wage-cut was reduced from 25% to 6½%. Conditions of rationalisation with higher pay for higher workload were settled. The Agreement also effected the standardization in the rates of weavers' wages which formerly varied from mill to mill.
This period was a period of stress and strain for the Textile Labour Association. During this time, the achievements of the Textile Labour Association in the social sphere took roots and the institution catering to the social and cultural needs of workers got further impetus and various activities for workers' welfare were undertaken. The Union covered all aspects both at workplace and outside. For the organization this was indeed a decade of expansion.

In 1924, the organised workers of Ahmedabad took a decision to send their representatives in the civic body of the city. A Harijan worker from the spinning department named Kacharabhai Bhagat contested the election and he was elected from Saraspur ward. This was the first entry of a Harijan worker in the municipality. Later on, in 1927, many more workers along with Shri Gulzarilal Nanda, Secretary of the Textile Labour Association, contested the civic election and they were duly elected. Thus, the attention of the civic body was particularly drawn to the civic needs of the workers of the city.

Another important development was the Payment of Wages Act, 1936. Under this act, the system of giving damaged cloth in lieu of wages was stopped and regularity in the payment of wages was brought about.

There was an unusual awakening in 1930 in the entire country. The nationwide Satyagraha movement for the attainment of independence was started in April.
The workers of Ahmedabad rose to the occasion and participated in the movement by organising picketing of liquor shops, augmenting the sale of Khadi and recruiting volunteers for Satyagraha.

Under the influence of the freedom movement and in pursuance with the resolution for complete independence adopted by the Indian National Congress at its Lahore Session in December 1929, the Association also deemed it proper to amend the constitution proposing nationalisation of the Textile Industry as its ultimate goal.

THIRD DECADE - 1937 to 1946

This was a period of consolidation. The Indian National Congress resolved to accept offices in July 1937 in provinces where the Congress was in majority under the Government of India Act 1935. The trade unions of Ahmedabad which were registered were allotted two seats in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. It was decided by the Association to participate in the administration of the Province. As the Textile Labour Association was a registered trade union, its two representatives, Shri Gulzarilal Nanda and Shri Khandubhai Desai were duly elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly as Congress nominees from the constituency. Nandaji was then taken up as Parliamentary Secretary by the then Chief Minister B.G. Kher of the erstwhile Bombay state.
In 1938, the Government of Bombay appointed the Textile Labour Enquiry Committee which was headed by Shri Jairamdas Doulatram. This Committee conducted a detailed inquiry into conditions of the textile industry, in all its aspects. The interim report of the Committee recommended the rise of 8% to 12% in workers' wages. The Government ordered the industry to implement the interim recommendations of the Committee.

The Ahmedabad Millowners' Association being offended by the above move of the Government informed the Textile Labour Association that the existing permanent machinery of arbitration would end.

Thus the need arose for settling disputes on the basis of mutual negotiations, conciliation failing then, by adjudication. This gave rise to the enactment of the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act, 1938. This Act was based on the Textile Labour Association's experience of settling industrial disputes during two decades of its existence. Under this Act, workers were given equal status with employers in the matter of effecting change in service and working conditions.

Experiment of prohibition of intoxicating drinks was undertaken by the Government of Bombay when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel inaugurated the scheme in Ahmedabad on July 20, 1939. Another important development was the starting of an Industrial Training Workshop at Saraspur, which was the heart of the labour locality of Ahmedabad in 1939. This was done mainly to afford systematic training to the workers for some alternate occupation.
When the Second World War broke out, there was rise in prices of essential commodities. In 1940, the Textile Labour Association decided to demand dearness allowance so as to neutralise the rise in the cost of living. After a protracted procedure under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1938, the matter was finally referred to the Industrial Court and the proposed general strike was averted. The award of the Court gave 66% neutralisation against increased cost of living in cash and the remaining in kind. Both the associations entered into an agreement to pay the amount of dearness allowance in cash in 1941. Under the new agreement, the workers of Ahmedabad got dearness allowance to the extent of 96.66% of the total rise in the cost of living.

Due to the war, the industry could make remarkable improvement in profits in 1941. The Textile Labour Association demanded 25% rise in general wages. The case was referred to the Industrial Court and the award was given in the terms of settlement arrived at between the parties outside the Court. Under this settlement, the workers were paid one and a half month's wages as Bonus for the year 1941 as deferred wages. Thus, both the parties accepted the principle of deferred wage by way of bonus which formed the basis of the Bonus legislation.

During the Quit India movement of 1942, the workers of Ahmedabad spontaneously participated in the struggle for independence and they voluntarily struck work on the 8th August for a period of 105 days as a
protest against the continuance of the British rule. This long protest strike is indeed a high watermark in the history of our freedom movement.

During the movement, the then Secretaries of the Association - Shri Gulzarilal Nanda and Khandubhai Desai along with S.R. Vasavada and Somnath Dave courted imprisonment. The workers resumed work only when they received message from Mahatma Gandhi from the jail. The workers braved hunger and also sold their personal effects and fought non-violently against the draconian violence of the alien rule.

In 1943, the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association along with the state Government, filed a revision application in the Industrial Court to effect reduction in the percentage of neutralisation of the dearness allowance. This case was thoroughly argued out with the help of late Shri Bhulabhai Desai on behalf of T.L.A. The Court after hearing both the parties dismissed the petition filed by the employers.

In 1939, it was decided at a meeting of Gandhi Seva Sangh to start Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, under the stewardship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to impart training to such young persons who wanted to take up trade union work as their mission. The Textile Labour Association was selected for giving such training, both theoretical and practical.

In 1943, the workers of Ahmedabad felt the need for a strong constructive countrywide trade union movement. They collected a large sum of money to establish and extend...
help to such a movement. This sum was spent in imparting training to trade union workers under the auspices of the training scheme of Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh as also helping them in their respective provinces to start Workers' unions. This sowed the seeds of the birth of the Indian National Trade Union Congress along with the formation of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh.

There was a great upsurge of nationalism in the aftermath of the Quit India movement. The British Government, in October 1943, suspended the Ahmedabad Municipality and in January 1944, it was decided to hold free elections. People interpreted this move of the Government as a test of popular support to the Indian National Congress. The Textile Labour Association put up 17 candidates out of total 52 seats as the Congress nominees. Seven of these seats were reserved for Harijans. All the seats in labour areas were contested and all the candidates put up by the Association were elected with overwhelming majority.

The representatives of labour in the Municipality evinced active interest in providing essential civic amenities viz. Schools, Water taps, etc. in areas where the poor and the working class people were residing.

In the Provincial Assembly election of 1946, Shri Khandubhai K. Desai and Shri Gulzarilal Nanda were again elected to the two labour seats for the workers of Ahmedabad. Nandaji became Labour Minister in the Congress Ministry of the then Bombay Province. He tried to implement the labour policy of the Congress in the state by initiating
the progressive measures of the Bombay Industrial Relations Act and providing houses for the workers under the Post-War Reconstruction Scheme. The Textile Labour Association had entered into agreement with some mills to run eight-hour shift instead of nine-hour shift much before the Factories Act of 1948 came into force. Thus, the Association was again the precursor of achieving reduction in the hours of work.

The main achievements of the Association therefore were shorter working hours, higher neutralisation of cost of living, introduction of an annual bonus by agreement and above all, development of trade union cadre through educational and training programme. In 1946, during the period of communal riots in Ahmedabad labour localities remained aloof and untouched by the communal frenzy.

There was an international conflagration in the Second World War and nationally a period of struggle to achieve full freedom. When the Second World War ended, it was impossible for the British to keep India under their yoke. The labour Government in Britain came into power and steps were afoot to make India free. Communists wanted to take advantage of the situation and gave a call for a nationwide strike to paralyse all essential services. Fortunately, the call was not responded to by the patriotic workers. On the contrary, the appeal made by Shri Khandubhai K. Desai to the workers and servicemen was well received and unity amongst workers was strengthened.
This ultimately led to the formation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, as a national trade union centre. Mahatma Gandhi and other leading members of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, along with some independent trade unions, in fact decided to start an All India National Organisation of workers on the principles and policies of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad free from communist influence.

Shri Gulzarilal Nanda, Secretary of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh convened a meeting of nationalist-minded trade unionists at New Delhi on the 3rd May, 1947 under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, President of Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh. Trade Unions covering nearly all the trade occupations and services were represented in the founding session of their foremost leaders. At this Conference, it was decided to form the Indian National Trade Union Congress. A provisional executive with Dr. Suresh Chandra Banerjee as its President and Shri Khandubhai Desai as its General Secretary was formed.

On the occasion of India's independence on the 15th of August, 1947, the textile labour association displayed a special picture showing Mahatma Gandhi in the forefront pointing out to the workers that what was achieved today was only political freedom, but the path for reaching the goal of social and economic freedom is indeed far yet. On the night of 14th August, the workers came in a procession with torches in their hands to the
Union Office and took oath to preserve their freedom and work for better life.

In 1947, a Labour Co-operative Bank named the Majoor Sahakari Bank Ltd., was started with a view to encourage the habit of thrift and savings and to relieve the workers from the grip of usurers as also private money-lenders. After the second World War, in 1947, the workers put forth a demand for standardisation of wage for all categories of workers in the textile industry. A special assessor was appointed to assist the Industrial Court in the matter. The Award for the rise of wages was given by the Court in 1947 with retrospective effect. The Award was, indeed, first of its kind in India because it was a very comprehensive award covering standardisation of wages for all categories of workers in the industry. The award made the workers of all categories conscious of their rights in the matter of their wages. There was then an unprecedented rise in the membership of the Association.

Thus, during the period 1917 to 1947, the workers of Gujarat experienced pangs of depression as well as achieved some gains of boom periods while they learnt to overcome economic and political crisis by living up to the lessons taught by Mahatma Gandhi. The Textile Labour Association represented how a trade union of Gandhiji's conception could function in an unassuming manner in order to help the workers to grow to their full height.

The Textile Labour Association endeavoured to cater to the aspiration of the workers in a capital way.
It concentrated its energies on the task of creating physical conditions where the workers would live a happy and healthy life and also enlighten themselves on various phases of life which would make their life more useful. They would thus, without any fear, negotiate with their employers in times of crisis in a peaceful manner and if the negotiations failed and arbitration was not accepted by the other side, they would then resort to strike in a peaceful way. It is thus seen that a trade union based on such democratic ideals alone was eminently fitted to evolve peaceful industrial relations.

There was a time when Harijan workers were not inclined to send their children for schooling. With a view to attract these children, a residential-cum-teaching school was started. Two study homes at Saraspur and Asarwa were opened in 1937 providing facilities for study to the children of the working class, namely Vaghari who were educationally backward and who had very little spare space in one-room tenements for study. A girls' hostel (J.B. Kanyagrah) was started in 1927, with the main object of providing facilities for study and all-round development of young working class girls. Most of the girls admitted in the hostel hailed from the Harijan community.

The Association deemed it expedient to start a special section for rendering assistance to the working class women for which a batch of women workers interested in social service were engaged. The main activities taken up by these workers comprised close contacts with the
working class women, so as to look into their difficulties and taking steps to redress them, besides organising literacy classes, imparting training in various arts such as sewing, knitting, etc., and organising entertainment programmes.

Since 1929, the Textile Labour Association has been making all possible efforts to encourage co-operative activity among the industrial population of Ahmedabad. The movement had witnessed a steady growth. Trade unionism and co-operative movement helped each other in their growth. They were both complimentary to each other in their aims and objects.

The Majoor Sahakari Bank was started in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi advised the workers to learn some alternate occupation so as to enable them to pull on in times of adversity or closing of some departments or units. During the freedom movement in 1930, Gandhiji on his march to Dandi, advised the workers to use hand-spun and hand-woven Khadi cloth. With a view to pursue this objective, the Textile Labour Association deemed it proper to open a Khadi shop in the same year.

Thus, the Textile Labour Association worked towards amelioration of socio-economic conditions of the workers in a peaceful manner which is unique in the history of the trade union movement in India. According to Mahatma Gandhi, the functions of the union were to cultivate integral strength and to improve the life of the workers by securing adequate wages and healthy living conditions while serving the industry to the best of one's capacity. It is due to this philosophy that the workers of Ahmedabad were in a
position to get higher wages, better working conditions and productivity. After Gujarat, the movement on the Textile Labour Association model spread out to Madhya Bharat culminating in the formation of the first Textile Workers Federation at the national level.

The basic philosophy underlying the success of the Textile Labour Association was that the trade union leader should act like a mother who attends to her children to cure the ailment and even gives bitter medicine and the trade union leader should not act like a politician who does all sorts of manoeuvres to keep up his position. The Association throughout tackled the basic issues pertaining to workers and industrial matters on sound principles laid down by Gandhiji. It never allowed any political party to dabble into the affairs of the union. This is the other secret of the successful running of the Textile Labour Association. Mahatma Gandhi insisted that workers should be made to consolidate the economic gains achieved by them, i.e., higher wages and lesser hours of work through various constructive activities.

Let us now evaluate the main events of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad from 1917 to 1948.

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Subject</th>
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<td>1917</td>
<td>*Warpers' strike for plague bonus - first and foremost incident - pre-union period. *Smt. Anasuyabehn Sarabhai addressed the workers of the spinning department on 4-12-1917 ultimately leading to the beginning of the labour movement in Ahmedabad.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>*20,000 weavers' dispute - Gandhiji's fast, compromise.</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>1922</td>
<td>*Industrial position as under: No. of mills - 56, No. of spindles - 11,33,588, No. of looms - 26,266. *Strike in all mills in support of their demand for Bonus - dispute referred to arbitration of Gandhiji and Shri Madan Mohan Malaviya as Umpire.</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>*General strike (April 1st to June 4th) on account of MOA's refusal to accede to arbitration for wage-cut dispute.</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>*Entry of organized labour in civic affairs. *Starting publication of Textile Labour Association's organ - MAJUR SANDESH.</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>*Bapu's Dandi March - Participation by workers - Bapu's message at Chandola to the workers.</td>
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<td>1931-32</td>
<td>*Indore (Bhandari Mills') Strike.</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>*Nadiad New Shorrock Mill Strike.</td>
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<td>1934 October</td>
<td>*Negotiations at Wardha. *Arbitration proceedings at Bangalore.</td>
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| 1934 August | *Future negotiations at Patna.
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<td>1934 August</td>
<td>Resuming arbitration proceedings at Ahmedabad before Sjts. Manu Subedar and Seth Chamanlal Parekh.</td>
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<td>September-October</td>
<td>*Again resuming arbitration at Bombay (Victoria Mills Premises) before Sjts. Manu Subedar and Seth Chamanlal Parekh.</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>*Differing awards by Arbitrators - dispute referred to Justice S.S. Patkar as Umpire and his award.</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>*20 per cent wage-cut proposal by MOA again, arbitration proceedings before Gandhiji's and Seth Kasturbhai Lalbhai - Wardha.</td>
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<td>1936 December</td>
<td>Differing Awards by Arbitrators.</td>
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<td>1937 January</td>
<td>*Dispute referred to Justice Madgaonkar as Umpire - hearing at Poona (Parnakuti) and his Award.</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>*Two seats provided to the Textile Labour Association in the Provincial Assembly.</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>*Registration of the Textile Labour Association under the Indian Trade Union Act.</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>*Payment of Wages Act in force from 28-3-1937.</td>
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<td>1937-38</td>
<td>*Onslaught of Communists thwarted.</td>
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1938

*Government of Bombay appointed Textile Labour Inquiry Committee with Shri S.R. Vasavada as one of its members.

*Bombay Industrial Dispute Act in 1938.*

1939 July

*Prohibition department was started.

*Standing orders were decided under the Act.*

1939-40

*Demand for D.A. (Dearness Allowance) to neutralize rise in the cost of living.*

Notice of strike given by the Textile Labour Association on 26-2-40 to the MOA (Millowners' Association) first.

1939-40

*Award delivered by the Industrial Court on 26-4-1940.*

1941

*Demand by the Textile Labour Association for 25% rise in wages.

1942

*Role of labour in the national movement - 'KARENCE YA MARENGE' - Quit India Movement.*

*Agreement for Bonus of 2 months' basic wages for 1942.*

1942

*Secretaries Sjs. G.L.Nanda, K.K.Desai, S.R.Vasavada and S.P.Dave, were imprisoned.*

1943

*MOA's (Millowners' Associations') demand to reduce percentage of neutralisation of dearness allowance. Late Shri Bhulabhai Desai argued out the case on behalf of the Textile Labour Association. The petition was dismissed by the Court.*

1946

*Communal riots in the city - labour remained aloof from it.*
1946
*Formation of the Textile Workers' Federation.

1946
*Shri Nandaji & Shri Khandubhai were again elected to the Provincial Assembly on labour seats. Nandaji became Minister of Labour, and the enactment of the S.I.R. Act took place.

1946
*Reduction of hours of work - 48 from 54.

1947 15th August
*Independence Day.

1947
*Communal riots broke out again in the city. Labour remained aloof from it.

1947
*Formation of the I N T U C (Indian National Trade Union Congress).

1947
*Work among Railway Labour.

1947
*Opening of Khadi Hat.

1947
*Founding of Labour Bank.

1947
*Nandaji convened meeting of nationalistic minded trade unionists under Presidentship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

1948
*Standardization of Wages - Award. Rise in membership upto 1,04,000.

1948
**'Three Days' were observed by workers on account of the sad demis of Gandhiji. The workers resolved to collect 3 days wages to commemorate and spread Gandhiji's principles all over the country.

1948
*The E.S.I. Scheme was introduced.
The story of militant but non-violent trade unionism is essentially a historical study of the inception and growth of the Textile Labour Association under the able guidance of veterans, such as, Mahatma Gandhi and Anasuyabehn Sarabhai. Mahatma Gandhi gave the last message to the workers of Ahmedabad at Chandola lake on leaving for Dandi Kuch in 1930. He preached love and brotherhood, abolition of untouchability, abolition of foreign cloth, use of Khadi cloth, abolition of liquor, not to spend money unnecessarily and he advocated that the workers may join the struggle of Satyagraha.

The study of the labour movement of Gujarat brings out how the fate of institutions can be moulded effectively given a visionary at the threshold of decision-making. Given the turbulent times, conflicting political and economic interests of the two nations, England and India, independence movement and its social cross-currents, two world wars, the rise and sustenance of communism by a hostile foreign government, it was indeed a miracle that the Textile Labour Association kept itself aloof of all these turbulences of its times and followed a path of constructive action in its confrontations with the owners of industry.

Mahatma Gandhi's manner of resolving industrial disputes was where there was total employer-employee harmony and injustice was done to none. Disputes were resolved through love and understanding; no coercion, force or violence was used. Conceptually, this was an appeal to the inner maturity of the worker. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violent philosophy gave shape and strength to the Textile Labour Association over its chequered history. Indeed as a consequence of this
unique Gandhian methodology of resolving disputes, the Textile Labour Association stands out as a model amongst trade unions. The symbiotic relationship between capital and labour preached by Gandhi was built on the Indian ethos exemplified by satyagraha. There was no class-war or dictatorship of the proletariat in this scheme of things. It was an integrated approach of the employer and employee in resolving disputes. The result was beneficial and ennobling to both the sides. The important distinguishing characteristics of this approach were that the Majoor Mahajan (executive body of the Textile Labour Association) preached that the capitalists were the trustees as they were more clever and the workers ignorant. The capitalists were necessary for society. Capitalists and labour were two wheels of the social chariot on which life moved. Therefore, no necessity of class conflict. Hence it resolved to solve all disputes by arbitration.

In this spirit of co-operation, the various subscriptions of the Textile Labour Association from the workers were actually collected by the mill-owners from the pay counters till 1936. Moreover, the mill-owners themselves made donations to the Textile Labour Association to enable it to carry on its social activities. The Majoor Mahajan was organized on a craft basis and it did not unite on the basis of industry or at an all-India level. This organization would never participate in political actions. Thus a whole philosophy of trade unionism had been formulated which was different from many other contemporary trade union methodologies. Two conflicting interests were represented by a brother and sister.
team, the brother being Ambalal Sarabhai who represented the mill-owners in the various periods of strife and the sister being Anasuya Sarabhai, who supported and guided the course of events along with Mahatma Gandhi during those strikes.

Valuable contributions were made for the cause of labour welfare by an eminent Indian, Mr. N.M. Joshi, in his interventions over a period of four decades in the deliberations of the International Labour Organisation. Anasuyabehn organised the textile labour of Ahmedabad along Gandhian lines of thought. Thus, it was in Ahmedabad that the seeds of militant but non-violent trade unionism were first sown. Like Mahatma Gandhi's experiment in political action in South Africa, his experiment in labour action in Ahmedabad was the prelude to greater events.

Other important events were the rise of labour militancy and the role of other trade union leaders for example, M.N. Roy and S.A. Dange. On 15 March, 1914, Anasuyabehn started a school in the Amarpura locality of Ahmedabad. At this time, the condition in Amarpura Chawl was quite bad. Anasuyabehn worked along with another lady called Jashodabehn. They offered the children maternal love. It was this school that became in due course the beginning of the Ahmedabad and national labour movement.

Anasuyabehn also started a class for adult literacy. The Majur Mitra Mandal was formed by Shankaralal Banker, Kalidas Jaskaran Jhaveri, Anubhai Mehta and a few others. The Mandal mooted the idea of adding other activities to ones dealing strictly with education.
Due to lack of credit facilities on reasonable terms for the workers, a Cooperative Credit Society was established. Bhajan Mandalis got active in the chawl and the process of workers’ regeneration had begun.

About the time of the strike in which Mahatma Gandhi was involved, Shankarlal Banker made a study of the situation taking the case of a two loom weaver in the Weaving Department of the mill.

Anasuyabehn found that workers worked in the mills under alternate names during different shifts and some warpers were working 36 hours at a stretch with only a few short breaks. She was most upset to find babies asleep between the machines, breathing air full of dust and cotton fluff.

At Mahatma Gandhi’s suggestions, the Home Rule League had initiated satyagraha. Anasuyabehn volunteered to join the movement and signed the satyagraha pledge. A branch of the League was formed in Ahmedabad which took Shankarlal there. It was here that he became better acquainted with Anasuyabehn’s labour activities. Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to Shankarlal when he wanted factual material on labour conditions in Ahmedabad. Anasuyabehn, in turn became Shankarlal Banker’s link to labour.

In December 1917, warpers in Ahmedabad mills went on the warpath. They wanted an increase in their wages.
workers' demand and the strike notice bore the signature of Anasuyabehn. The warpers waited and the 48 hour notice period passed and the warpers went on strike.

Though warpers formed an important segment of a textile mill, their numbers were relatively small. Agents of the mill owners had gone to Bombay and recruited warpers who would be brought to Ahmedabad.

The strike extended over a period of two months. The warpers had demanded a pay rise of 25 per cent which worked to 15 pies. The mill owners said that they would pay 14½ pies. Anasuyabehn got the warpers to agree to this. This strike, first of its kind, had been started on 4th December and the Ahmedabad labour was to celebrate it in the years to come as Majoor Din (Labour Day). The strike was organised well and also planned properly. It was to set a precedent.

Shankarilal Banker set down the principles that characterised the strike. He said that the struggle must be in furtherance of definite aims, the demand must be clear, the demand must be approved by all the workers, the demand must be placed in writing, sufficient time must be given to the employers to consider the demand, complete peace must be maintained if the demand is rejected, all proper arrangements must be made by responsible leaders in order that the strike may be peaceful, the leaders must obtain proper guidance, no worker should become a victim to threats and that there must be provision for arriving at the settlement under proper terms and conditions.
Anasuyabehn, who was leading the strike had laid down that violence should not be resorted to under any circumstances. Her guide and source of inspiration was Mahatma Gandhi.

Thus, in Ahmedabad, the situation was getting critical. Workers in some mills had struck work and the millowners were on the point of declaring a simultaneous lock-out in all mills. Mahatma Gandhi laid down some rules to guide him and his followers in the days to come. They were to visit the workers' houses and share their happiness and misery to the extent possible, to advise the workers regarding their conduct during the struggle, to enlighten the workers on the issues and principles involved in the struggle, to issue instructive leaflets everyday with a view to fixing firmly in their minds the principles and significance of the struggle and to supply them with simple but elevating literature which would conduce to their mental and intellectual development.

Accordingly, Anasuyabehn, Shankarlal and Chhaganlal Gandhi would daily visit the workers in their chawls and collect information about them. Arrangements for medical treatment were made for those who were ill. The workers were told that they were free to call on Anasuyabehn or Shankarlal at any time.

Shankarlal, in his book 'Gandhiji Ana Majoor Pravrutti' devoted a chapter to "The way of a just struggle." He wrote that certain principles and methods of work arising from this strike are beneficial and of significance. He said that it was natural that differences between workers and
employers arise in industrial matters. Norms and rules therefore had to be evolved or devised to resolve those differences in a straightforward manner. According to him, the following principles and methods become self-evident in the course of the Weavers' Strike:

(1) Legitimate/reasonable demand.
(2) Settlement through negotiations.
(3) Solution through arbitration.
(4) Arbitration beneficial for both.
(5) When is strike inevitable?
(6) The demand should not be extravagant.
(7) Ensure complete peace.
(8) Workers should not remain idle.
(9) Day to day contact with workers.
(10) Mutual goodwill.
(11) Alternative employment for sustenance.
(12) Aim of strike: change of heart.
(13) Readiness for settlement.
(14) A question of principle.
(15) Attempts at cordial relations.

E. Daya of the International Labour Office observed that the dispute between workers and millowners had two consequences, the unionisation of the workers and acceptance of the principle of voluntary arbitration. The Mill Jobbers' and Mukkadam's union was formed in 1919 and unions of workers in the weaving, sizing, folders, throstle, winding and the card, blow-room and frame departments and of drivers, oilmen and firemen were formed in 1920 with a total membership of over 16,000 or 43 per cent of the total labour force in employ-
ment. These occupational unions were the original units of constituting the Textile Labour Association.

E. Daya noted that one of the most remarkable things about the Ahmedabad experiment was the way Mahatma Gandhi paved the way for the unionisation of the workers without arousing the antagonism or active opposition of the mill-owners and for the latter's recognition and acceptance of the Union after it was formed. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi provided the workers and the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad with principles of respect for the workers' right to organise, of joint discussion with labour and of voluntary arbitration.

Shankarlal Banker was imprisoned in the Yervada prison. He emerged from it a transformed person. He threw himself into Khadi work and in 1923 a Khadi Board was formed with Jamnalal Bajaj as its President and Shankarlal as its Secretary. The Board was subsequently converted into the All India Spinners' Association in 1925 with Mahatma Gandhi as its President and Jawaharlal Nehru and Shankarlal as its Secretaries.

During the Dandi March in 1930 Gandhi utilised the services of Shankarlal. Mahatma Gandhi preached that the object of founding a mahajan (body of important leaders) was service of the workers in which there was no place for the slightest hatred. He asked the workers to remember three things. Firstly, to examine the rules and regulations of the mahajan. Secondly, to ensure the self-respect of the workers. Thirdly to enable the mahajan to be self-sufficient, he appealed to the workers to pay their monthly subscription regularly.
The wages of the workers were very low and so they had to send their women and children to work in the mills. Thus, according to Mahatma Gandhi, the purpose of founding the Mahajan was to enable the workers to earn higher wages and also to provide scope for the proper growth of the workers and their family members into a healthy and happy community.

When Mahatma Gandhi formed the constitution of the Mahajan, he laid special stress on the good use of money and time. Included were clauses that defined the aims as (1) to earn fair wages for the labour put in (2) to reduce the hours of work to ensure adequate rest for the workers (3) to take concrete steps to implement ideas of putting to good use the increase in wages and time saved.

Anasuya Behn was appointed the President of the Majoor Mahajan on the very day of its inception. Bhai Keshavji assisted in the office work of the Mahajan. He also helped in the setting up of children's schools in the Harijan localities. In addition, a Bhavsar youth, Bhai Vithaldas was employed. Due to the name of Anasuya Behn, many complaints were quickly settled. Where expert advice was necessary the services of Krishnalal Desai and Kalidas Jhaveri were available. Kalidas Jhaveri was appointed the Secretary to the Mahajan.

Seth Mangaldas, an enlightened millowner and employer was elected President of the Millowners' Association. Work in the Mahajan office would start sharp at 8.30 a.m. with a prayer in which all staff members joined. Staff members habitually wore Khadi, as a mark of their independence
The Mahajan functioned in a democratic manner. Each mill elected its own representatives to the Union's Council. All matters of importance were freely discussed in the council. Rules for election to the mandal were framed. All the activities to the institution were based on the principles of truth and non-violence.

Upto 1920 there was no occasion in Ahmedabad for paying bonus to the workers during Diwali. During the First World War (1914-1918) and for some time after, the Ahmedabad mills had made substantial profits. Workers were aware of this fact and had started making demands on the millowners for bonus. 

Mahatma Gandhi spoke to a millowner, Kasturbhai Lalbhai regarding this matter. Shankarlal was also pressed into making Mahatma Gandhi's views known to the millowners. Making no headway with the millowners, Mahatma Gandhi decided to talk the matter out with the workers. He said that a demand for bonus could only be made at the end of the year after studying the company balance-sheets. But this was not agreeable to the workers' representatives.

Thus, a crisis had been precipitated. The net result was that after a few days a delegation of Harivallabh Moolchand Mill representatives, under the leadership of Kanji Popat called on Mahatma Gandhi and told him that they were now willing to abide by whatever he said.

On the other hand, the workers near Raikhod who were led by Kachara Bhagat and Balu Maharaj, made fun of what they considered the weakness of the workers from the Khanpur area. Three months were to pass by before all the
workers came to appreciate Gandhi's stand and come round to accept it. Thus, the Throstle Workers Mahajan began functioning again under Anasuyabehn's presidency. Thereafter it was agreed that workers should get one month's salary as Diwali bonus.

On the second anniversary of the 1918 righteous struggle of the workers, Mahatma Gandhi again addressed the mill-hands in Ahmedabad. He said that unions were necessary both for the workers as well as capitalists. Gandhiji saw no natural antagonism between Capital and Labour.

The unions in Ahmedabad were formed on a craft basis like the Weavers' Union, the Winders' Union, etc., They were federated into the Textile Labour Association. Mahatma Gandhi said that the workers would approach the millowners through the unions and if the decisions of the former did not satisfy them, they would appeal to arbitration. He also said that strikes were an inherent right of working men for the purpose of securing justice, but they must be considered a crime immediately the capitalists accept the principle of arbitration.

Mahatma Gandhi also dwelt on the importance of workers developing their religious faith. He also mentioned about certain rules. The first is observance of truth. The second is not to injure others. The third rule is that we have to conquer passions.

However, for all the noble words and good intentions of Gandhi, industrial peace was hard to maintain. In May 1920 workers in the Throstle Section struck work for a wage of
of Rs.30 and reduction of working hours from 12 to 10.
This dispute was to see the emergence of arbitration
as a means of settling labour disputes.

The strike lasted ten days. On 23 May 1920, Gandhiji
addressed a meeting of the representatives of both the
mill owners and mill hands. For weavers and warpers the
rate was put down at 25 per cent but this was raised to
33.33 per cent. An increase of 40 per cent over the exist­ing
rate was done for the winders.

Due to the First World war the Indian textile
industry had a tremendous boost. The mills made phenomenal
profits in 1920. Workers felt that the bonus for 1921
should be much higher than what they have received the
previous year. Some felt that if the union asked for three
months' bonus it could surely get half the amount. However,
Mahatma Gandhi felt that once a properly conceived demand
was put forward, even a long drawn out struggle to achieve
it was to his mind legitimate. It was decided to ask only
for a bonus of a month and a half. However, Mangaldas said
that a bonus of a month and a half was out of the question.
Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who had come to Ahmedabad to
raise funds for Banaras Hindu University gave his own ruling.
He endorsed Gandhi's view on bonus. He fixed the amount to
be paid as under:

(a) To those in receipt of wages of less than Rs.75
should be paid one month's average wages plus Rs.7-8-0
as bonus.

(b) Those whose wages are Rs.75 or more should be
paid Rs. 75 as bonus.
It was decided that those workers who did not resume work and remained absent during interval when negotiations recommenced should compensate the mills by working for days during which they were absent. Pandit Malaviya's decision and the fact of his operating as an umpire was a landmark in the industrial relations of Ahmedabad. For once a principle had been established.

By 1922, faced with competition from the British textiles, the mills in Ahmedabad started feeling the pinch. Their managements thereupon decided to impose a wage cut of 20 per cent. Mangaldas preferred to approach the Majoor Mahajan to see whether the matter could be arbitrated. A vote was taken and almost all the union members voted in favour of a strike. The strike began on the 1st of April 1923. Shankarilal had talks first with the Mahajan leaders and especially with Anasuyabehn, Gulzarilal and Khandubhai. Shankarilal made arrangements to provide as many charkhas as possible to those left behind who were willing to spin.

The Board resolved that a mass meeting should be called and the proposal to call off the strike placed before them. Accordingly a meeting was held under the celebrated babul tree. Present on the occasion were Anasuyabehn, Shankarilal, Gulzarilal and Khandubhai.

Next day Gulzarilal and Khandubhai went from mill to mill to exhort the workers to go back and report for duty. It was only when the duo gave their signal that the mill-hands trooped back. The strike had lasted from the 1st of April.
to the 4th of June. It was till then the longest strike in Ahmedabad textile industry's history. The strike made the union weak. A compromise was made with the wage cut pegged at 15-5/8 per cent cut.

The Government of Bombay made a report on the Ahmedabad cotton mill industry. This was subsequently taken note of by the Royal Commission on Labour appointed on 4 July 1929 otherwise known as the Whitley Commission called after its Chairman John Henry Whitley. The Commission observed that Ahmedabad was almost unique among the industrial centres of India in that the employers and the larger proportion of the people who work, belonged to the same part of India and shared the same religion and mother tongue. Secondly, Mahatma Gandhi had a unique position whose influence in Ahmedabad, both with the employers and the workers was very great.

Thus, we see that the Gandhian concept came to prevail. However, it was seriously challenged later on. Acting under the leadership of Indulal Yajnik, a veteran public worker and representative of Ahmedabad in the Lok Sabha, the communists established an organisation called Sangram Samiti and carried on intensive agitation amongst workers on the issues of dearness allowance and bonus. However, eventually the superior organisation of the Association and its closer contacts with the workers defeated the attempt of the communists.

Mahatma Gandhi insisted upon the Textile Labour Association accepting truth and non-violence as the guiding principles of its activities. He did not believe in the
collaboration between workers and employers so that the interests of both could be advanced. He was not opposed to strikes but he advised them only when other methods failed and arbitration was refused. He insisted that workers had as much right, interest and stake in the industry as shareholders.

At Jamshedpur, Gandhi said: "My identification with labour does not conflict with my friendship with capital."  

In Mahatma Gandhi's opinion, it would be the most serious mistake to make use of labour strikes for political purposes. The Reed Committee report stated that there had been a spinners' strike in Ahmedabad in 1920 involving 30,000 men and a general strike, again in Ahmedabad involving 33,000 men in October 1921. The report mentioned certain common characteristics of the strikes:

(a) The frequency of the strike without notice.

(b) The absence of any clearly defined grievance before striking.

(c) The multiplicity and sometimes the extravagance of the claims put forward after the strike had begun.

(d) The absence of any effective organisation to formulate the claims of the operatives and secure respect for any settlement which may be made, and
The increasing solidarity of employers and employed and the capacity of the operatives to remain on strike for considerable periods despite the lack of any visible organisation.

The report also said that in Ahmedabad, the unions had attained complete recognition from the employers.

The concerns of the Industrial Disputes Committee were deep and profound. Living conditions of the Indian working class in Ahmedabad were more than deplorable.

On 23 August 1924, Mahatma Gandhi addressed two meetings, one at 4 p.m. at Maganbhai Wadi and then again at 5 p.m. on the banks of the Sabarmati under the famous babul tree. Akbar Khan and Kacharabhai both members of the Mahajan, made suitable speeches.

The 1923 strike gave a big jolt to the Majoor Mahajan. After the withdrawal of the strike, membership declined. Instead of getting disheartened, the office -bearers of the Mahajan decided to renew their efforts to build the organisation.

Khandubhai was one of the activists in the Mahajan office. The complaints procedure was clearly laid out. The complaints received were taken up by the representatives with the mill officials and those which were not sorted out were registered at the Mahajan's office. If the complaints were not resolved then they would submit them to arbitration. The objective was to
establish a family bond between employer and employee.

Shankarla with the active co-operation of Gulzarilal Nanda and Khandubhai and the blessings of Anasuyabehn started a weekly called Majoor Sandesh starting with 5 January 1924. In 1924 two important bodies were formed called the Matadar Mandal (Voters' Council) and Latta Mahajan (branch of Mahajan in workers' own locality). The first Latta Mahajan was established in Saraspur area and the second in Gomatipur. Their task was to collect union subscriptions without having to face needless harassment from mill officials.

In 1926, a Majoor Samaj Sudhar Sangh was formed with the object of encouraging self-improvement among workers. On Sunday, 18 October 1926 the annual meeting of the Joint Board of Representatives met at Satyagraha Ashram.

Social activism was coming increasingly to the front. In September 1928 the Mahajan's Board of Representatives passed a resolution for setting up a Volunteer Corps to render social service to the community. The Volunteer Corps was divided into three sections. Each section was charged with a particular duty. Section One was entrusted with the task of imparting physical education to the young. Section Two was put in charge of looking after the growth of the Mahajans. It fell to Section Three to undertake work of social reform. The Second and Third Sections were to be given primary training and were summoned once a month for a discussion pertaining to their work. The minimum age of admission was pegged at sixteen. Corps members were given specific uniforms.
It was creditable for the Mahajan that the Volunteer Corps started with an enrollment of two hundred. Nandshankar Bhatt had joined the Mahajan as a teacher in 1924 but he was then moved to the Volunteer Corps.

In 1925, a Bal Mandir was opened and children between the age of 3 and 7 were admitted to it. The idea in setting up the Bal Mandir was to take the children away from the dirt in the slums and bring them up in clean surroundings. Another addition to the educational field was the setting up of Kanyakriha - hostel meant for girls.

Jobbers in various mills began to realise that they too were employees even if they formed the link between employees and employers. They were persuaded to form a Jobber - Mukadam Mahajan which was to help in the growth of the primary Mahajan itself. In 1929, Shri S.R.Vasavada and Shri Kachchi joined the Majoor Mahajan and their services proved very useful.

Mahatma Gandhi and Seth Mangaldas held that no mill should place any impediment on union members. They also said that union subscriptions according to the rates fixed by the Majoor Mahajan should be deducted from the wages and receipts issued by the Mahajan be given to the workers.

In order that the people may be served well, the Congress party made a decision to fight elections to the Ahmedabad Municipality. In Ahmedabad, workers consisted half the population. The Majoor Mahajan decided to set up...
its own candidate, a Harijan labourer called Kachrabhai Bhagat from a workers' ward.

Vallabhbhai Patel was leading the Congress in Ahmedabad. During the municipal elections 4,000 new members were enrolled in the Majoor Mahajan. Elections to the Municipality came round again in 1927, but in the intervening two years, the atmosphere in Ahmedabad changed a lot.

The decision had been taken to ask Gulzarilal Nanda to stand from Saraspur alongside Kachrabhai. Nanda was opposed by a candidate of the Millowners, Seth Narasimhadas. Kachrabhai and Nanda were elected, the latter getting the highest number of votes. The Congress party itself was returned with a comfortable majority to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

The Government, nominated two citizens, Seth Kasturbhai and Seth Ambalal who with Vallabhbhai's consent, formed the Independent Party in the Corporation. Some other nominated members joined the party which named Ambalal as its president. Pestonshaw Vakil and Gulzarilal Nanda were appointed secretaries. The party formulated many progressive schemes for the welfare of workers which were duly implemented.

The year 1927, was difficult for Ahmedabad. There were heavy rains. After the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi relief work was undertaken. In 1927, a Scavenger Mahajan was formed with the help of Anasuyabehn and the Majoor Mahajan.
1928 was significant because of the event connected with the Gujarat Ginning Mills of Ahmedabad. The management tried to prevent unionisation of the workers. The mill declared a lock-out but later called off the lock-out and took back all who were willing to report to work. The mill also granted recognition to the Mahajan. But to get this right, the workers had to pay a heavy price.

By 1929 mills had begun to improve their financial position substantially. The question arose whether the Mahajan should ask for a wage increase or not. Diwan Bahadur Jhaveri became the Umpire. Mr. Jhaveri accepted the Mahajan's contention that the mills had performed well and quoted the Tariff Board's report of 1923. Mr. Jhaveri conceded that the artisans of the Weaving Department should be granted an increase of 5 per cent and workers of the Spinning Department whose wages were less than those of the Weaving Department should get a wage increase of 8 per cent. He held that it was necessary to restore the wages of the year 1923.

On 12th March, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi started on his Dandi March to launch the Salt Satyagraha. The response of the workers of Ahmedabad to the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle was tremendous. In Ahmedabad July 16, was observed as Labour Day. All mills remained closed. The Government came down heavily on labour. A security deposit was demanded from Major Sandesh, the weekly produced by the Mahajan.
Mahatma Gandhi visited Ahmedabad on 11 March 1931 and addressed a huge gathering of the workers. A Khadi Bhandar was opened on 4 May 1931 to popularise the use of Khadi. A mill-clerks union was also organised and was inaugurated on 11 May 1931.

The Whitley Commission named after its Chairman, John Henry Whitley was appointed on 4th July 1929 to enquire into and report on the existing conditions of labour in industrial undertakings and plantations in British India, on the health, efficiency and standard of living of the workers and on the relations between employers and employed. The Commission in its Report dated 14th March 1931 made over 350 recommendations covering a wide range of subjects, like Migration and Factory Workers, hours of work, working conditions in factories, season factories, unregulated factories, regularity of employment, Minimum wages, standardisation of wages, deductions, restrictions on sale of liquor, indebtedness, health and welfare, housing, etc. Commenting on the Whitley Report, Shankarlal Banker noted that the hours of work recommended were excessive and they should not be more than 8 hours a day.

The 1929 award by Diwan Bahadur K.M. Jhaveri created some satisfaction among the labourers of Ahmedabad. In October 1929 came the Wall Street Collapse which started the Great Depression and by 1932, the repercussions were felt in India.

On 16 September, 1932, the Millowners' Association wrote a formal letter to the Majoor Mahajan conveying their intention to effect a 25 per cent cut in wages of all the
workers from 16 October. The millowners pointed out that in the Ahmedabad textile industry, there was an unparalleled depression. Seth Mangaldas, long-time chief of the Millowners' Association died on 6 October 1930.

Mahatma Gandhi insisted that workers should get a minimum wage. The millowners did not agree on a minimum norm. They said that their responsibility was limited only to running the industry and to look after its interest. They also pleaded that the industry could survive only if the rate of return on the entire capital invested with fixed assets, without deducting depreciation therefrom were to be 8 per cent. This was defended on the basis of the observations of the Tariff Board in its 1934 Report which said that since, in the case of the Ahmedabad mills only a small proportion of the fixed capital expenditure is financed by the share capital the rate of return calculated on paid-up capital will not accurately represent the position.

In the case of the Ahmedabad textile industry, the fixed assets had been financed out of loans and not from paid-up capital. Mr. Justice S.S. Patkar, a retired judge of the Bombay High Court referred the matter of the Ahmedabad textile industry.

In 1935, the hours of work were reduced from 10 to 9 hours a day. Reacting to it, the millowners arbitrarily introduced a wage cut of 10 per cent. Long negotiations took place under Gandhi's terms and finally settlement of the dispute was facilitated by the introduction of a fifty-four-hour week from the 1st January 1935. Justice Patkar
was requested to endorse this settlement between the parties and embody these terms in his Award.

On 17 January 1935 Mr. Justice Patkar announced his award. Mahatma Gandhi told the workers to willingly accept the cut which had been agreed to on their behalf. Thus, under Mahatma Gandhi's guidance, a calamity was averted. The years between 1926 and 1933 were eventful in the history of the textile industry due to the new mills that sprang up and the changes in the character of production.

The leftist ideology and the role of the Communists also influenced the labour movement of Gujarat in a significant way. When Mahatma Gandhi addressed a meeting of the Majoors Mahajan on 29 June 1934, the Communists distributed printed leaflets in which he was described as a companion of capitalists.

Leaflets were also circulated when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed a meeting of workers on October 2.

The Ahmedabad labour functioned independently of labour elsewhere. It had its own sense of values and its own approach to workers' problems. On 4th December 1917, the workers of Ahmedabad had first launched their struggle. The first Workers' Day was celebrated in Ahmedabad on 4 December 1936.

There was a short period of peace in Ahmedabad on the labour front following the 1935 Delhi agreement. But by September 1936, the millowners were again getting restless. On 12 September they once again made a demand for imposing a 20 per cent cut in the wages of all artisans. The plea was advanced on the basis that the reduction of
only 6\(\frac{2}{4}\) per cent under the Delhi agreement was really not much of a reduction, but only a withdrawal of an earlier increase of 5 per cent in the Weaving Department and 8 per cent in the Spinning Department given in 1930. The matter was referred to the arbitrator, Seth Chamanlal. He too resigned and the Millowners' Association appointed Seth Kasturbhai Lalbhai as the new arbitrator.

Even as Seth Chamanlal had effected the cut without reference to the Mahajan, another mill, Manekchowk, had put up a notice announcing a 25 per cent cut in the Weaving Department. This was an unjust and un-constitutional step in defiance of the custom of arbitration. After a lot of deliberation, Mahatma Gandhi gave his award on 26 December 1936. He said that the case for wage cut was dismissed for the reason that the Millowners' Association had failed to prove it. At the same time Seth Kasturbhai in his award made two days later said that he submitted that the decision should be that the wage cut should be a minimum of 10 per cent with effect from 1 January 1937, provided that in the case of Weavers, the percentage of reduction shall be so adjusted as to bring the level of wages in the different mills to the level of 10 per cent below the current average of all the Weavers in the Ahmedabad industry.

Kasturbhai awarded a 10 per cent cut though the demand of the Millowners' Association was for a 20 per cent cut. Both parties agreed on the appointment of Sir Govind Madgeonkar, a former judge of the Bombay High Court as Umpire. After listening to both parties, Sir Govind gave his award.
He said that on merits, the Millowners' Association have not proved that a general wage cut is necessary and advisable for the mill industry taken as a whole, a conclusion which agrees with Mahatma Gandhi's and not with Seth Kasturbhai's. He concluded that the Millowners' Association had far better access to facts and figures than the Textile Labour Association. He gave importance to unity in industry.

As late as 1935 many mills in Ahmedabad had the practice of giving damaged cloth to weavers, in lieu of wages. The Majoor Mahajan finally had to step in to stop this obnoxious practice. There was no way in which the weavers could assess the worth of the cloth. It had to be sold in the market and the weavers could get only what the market would fetch. The enactment of the Regulation of Payment of Wages Act on 28 March 1937 helped eliminate many injustices done to workers. The new Act made it unlawful to deduct fines from wages. No charge could be made either against medical assistance, supply of water, lighting, etc. without government sanction.

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Majoor Mahajan had registered itself and it could therefore send two of its men to the Bombay Legislative Assembly. One of the earliest steps taken by the first ever popular government in Bombay was the appointment of the Textile Labour Inquiry Committee on 13 October 1937 to investigate into the question of the adequacy of wages and kindred matters in connection with the textile industry in Bombay province. The remarkable things about this Committee's Report were its...
findings on various subjects that had plagued employer-employee relations for two decades like defining a living wage standard, a minimum wage, wage standardisation, automatic adjustment of wages, rationalisation, etc. The Doulatra Ram Divatia Report was to clarify issues to a great extent.

After 1936, the economy of the Ahmedabad Textile industry was on the up-swing. This led the Major Mahajan to demand a rise of 10 to 15 per cent in wages. After taking voluminous evidence from all possible sources the Textile Labour Inquiry Committee submitted its Interim Report on 11 February 1938. The Committee recommended a wage increase of 8 to 13 per cent and the Government ordered the industry to implement the recommendation. This so offended the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association that it informed the Textile Labour Association that the existing machinery of arbitration would come to an end. It was a one sided step. The Committee, in its final report dated 27th July 1940 made many recommendation covering the whole gamut of industrial relations, based on conclusions it arrived at over the period of study. These included the minimum wage, standardization of wages, working of shifts, rationalization, welfare work and social legislation.

The Bombay Industrial Disputes Act had been passed by the then Congress government for the promotion of peaceful and amicable settlement of industrial disputes by conciliation and arbitration, an idea inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. The Congress government had announced on 17 August 1937 its policy in the matter of labour. The idea was to replicate wherever possible the Ahmedabad experiment, as it was called,
which had proved to be successful.

The Hon. B.G. Kher, Chief Minister in the Bombay Legislature was also in charge of labour. In 1934, the Government of Bombay had passed the Trade Disputes Conciliation Act, the principal feature of which was the appointment of a Labour Officer. Mr. Kher said that in Ahmedabad the labour there did not think it necessary to appoint Labour Officer as they already had an arbitration machinery functioning well.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was also interested in the Bill. However, the Communists and other left-wing leadership saw it in a different manner. Heading the criticism at the Bill was Mr. R.A. Khedgikar (Sholapur City, Textile Labour) who lashed out at the Bill at its very first reading. He asserted that he had the right to speak on behalf of labour as he was a member of the All India Trade Union Congress Working Committee and Vice-President of the Bombay Provincial Trade Union Congress of which Mr. Jamnadas Mehta was the President.

The Communists had been throughout active. They could neither accept the concept of conciliation and arbitration in good faith for the simple reason that their entire philosophy was based not on conciliation but on class conflict. They could not make much headway in Ahmedabad where the Majoor Mahajan was deeply entrenched. But they could operate freely in Bombay where, in 1939, they could instigate strikes in 33 mills. In Ahmedabad too, they sought to break Majoor Mahajan solidarity and called for a one-day strike on 12th December 1939, but out of 1,07,000 workers they could get
hardly 250 to 300 respond to their call.

Due to the Second World War which broke out in September 1939, the cost of living began to soar. A representation was made both to the Government and to the Millowners' Association that they should either bring down the prices or make arrangements to supply essential commodities at pre-war prices; if neither was possible, the Major Mahajan sought a rise in wages corresponding to the rise in the cost of living.

On 15 January 1940 a notice was served on the mills according to the relevant clause of the Industrial Disputes Act for paying the dearness allowance. The matter was taken for conciliation and the government appointed Justice Rajadhyaksha as the Special Conciliator. He now took up the matter and awarded a 5 per cent rise in wages in cash and ordered that arrangements be made for the supply of 22 essential commodities at the prices before the war.

The Mahajan was willing to accept a smaller wage increase on condition that in addition to the 22 items to be supplied at pre-war prices, ghee and cloth were also added to the list. But the millowners were unwilling to oblige. A strike now seemed inevitable. Gulzarilal Nanda sought Gandhi's advice and went to Wardha for that purpose. Mahatma Gandhi sent a message to the workers of Ahmedabad. He told them that their demand was just and if they did not get justice through arbitration or any other method, they had the only remedy of a strike.

After the decision to go on strike was taken, a meeting was held on 25 February 1940 in the compound of
of the Majoor Mahajan Office which was attended by over 65,000 workers. Addressing the meeting Anasuyabehn said that the basis of their struggle was the observance of their principles, their discipline and restraint in conduct. The struggle was an ordeal of fire and one for self-purification. She further said that like the 1918 righteous struggle, this struggle must also be conducted so that it may be a source of inspiration for years to come.

Shankarlal also made a brief speech. The strike was to start on 26th February 1940, but the millowners came round, discussions were resumed and an honourable settlement was arrived at. It bore the signature of Haridas Achratlal, President of the Millowners' Association and Anasuyabehn, President of the Majoor Mahajan. Adjudication of the dispute by the Industrial Court was accepted by both the parties. So were the terms of reference.

On 26th April 1940, a full Bench of the Industrial Court delivered its judgement. The Court estimated that there was a rise of 15 per cent in the cost of living in Ahmedabad between August 1939 and December 1939. The Court recommended a cash allowance of 10 per cent of the average wage and cost price-grain-shops for the supply of certain cereals and pulses to the employees. By virtue of the award workers got dearness allowance neutralizing to the extent of 66 per cent the rise in prices.

Mahatma Gandhi's time was increasingly being taken by political matters. In that sense 1940 was to be a landmark
In 1937, the Congress party formally took over the administration of Bombay for the first time. Mr. Gulzari-lal Nanda of the Majoor Mahajan became Parliamentary Secretary to Chief Minister (then Premier) Bal Gangadhar Kher.

The Communists in India had always looked to Moscow in Russia for instructions. Thus, it was no different when Adolf Hitler started the Second World War. To the Communist Party of India fell the task of supporting the British war effort in India. The orders to the Communist Party of India came via the British Communist Party. Harry Pollitt, Secretary of the British Communist Party addressed a strong letter to the Communist party of India. The letter was delivered to the Indian Communist party through the Home Secretary of the Government of India. This put the Communists in India in the same camp as the British imperialists whom they had till then been condemning.

During all the past years, the Communist Party of India had been running down Mahatma Gandhi as a stooge of the capitalists. The communists under the direction of Philip Spratt had sought to destroy the Textile Labour Association, but the Textile Labour Association had withstood the attempts.

When the communists joined the British in their war efforts, the Textile Labour Association came into prominence. The communists were shown up as betrayers of India's struggle for freedom.

There was a split in the All India Trade Union Congress. A section of labour leaders led by M.N. Roy, the
Radical Democrat, seceded from the All India Trade Union Congress to form a separate central organisation called the Indian Federation of Labour. The nationalist elements in the All India Trade Union Congress followed the lead of the Congress and most of them were arrested and detained for a long time. Though, throughout the war years N.M. Joshi was the General Secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress, effective power passed into the hands of the communists. The communists in the All India Trade Union Congress began to act as the agents of the British and the employers. The Textile Labour Association could now accuse the communists for their despicable role.

Following the resignation of the Congress Ministries, there was a brief period of relative calm. The British had sent Sir Strafford Cripps to negotiate with Indian leaders which however could not succeed. The communists under the guidance of Moscow and the British Communist Party insisted that the failure of the Cripps Mission could not be considered as a justification for opening a direct struggle for independence and they continued to advocate collaboration with the British in their war efforts.

The Communist Party of India was declared legal on 22 July 1942 and it came out against the Quit India movement. But the Communists did not know how to handle the situation. On the one hand, they had to note that the people were behind the Quit India movement. On the other hand, they felt compelled to support the war efforts. The two positions were very different and there was no way a meaningful via media could be established. This is clearly shown in a Manifesto issued
by the Communist Party of India in September 1942. The Manifesto appealed to the government to give up its repressive policy, to release Gandhi and other Congress leaders, to lift the ban on Congress and open negotiations for a national government. The Manifesto condemned the Quit India Movement as an act of sabotage.

The workers of Ahmedabad could get a bonus equivalent to 2½ months' wages in January 1943. By its order dated 15th September 1941, the Industrial Court, Bombay had granted to the textile workers of Ahmedabad full neutralization of the increase in the cost of living. In 1943, the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association petitioned to the Industrial Court for reducing the proportion of dearness allowance granted by it in 1941. This plea was supported by the Advocate General of the Bombay province who appeared before the Industrial Court on behalf of the Government. M.C.Setalvad and Bhulabhai J.Desai appeared respectively for the Millowners' Association and the Textile Labour Association in this historic case. In Industrial Court, however, rejected the petition of the Millowners' Association.

Mahatma Gandhi was released on May 6, 1944. From all parts of the country, Congressmen approached Mahatma Gandhi for advice. Mahatma Gandhi said that the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh would guide the activities of all Congressmen who engage themselves in labour work and the Sangh would provide for the training of Congressmen desirous of taking up trade union work.
General elections were held in 1946. The Congress candidates were elected by huge majorities and Congress Ministries were formed in all the states, except those in Bengal, Punjab and Sind. In Bombay, Gulzarilal Nanda, now a full-fledged Labour Minister, amended the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act of 1938, according to the experience gained in its working. The result was the Bombay Industrial Relations Act of 1946. This Act gave recognition to trade unions as the collective bargaining agent for an industry for a local area and conferred several rights on such recognised representative unions. For the first time, there was compulsion on employers to recognise trade unions by this legislation.

In November 1946, the Central Board of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh called upon its various member unions to affiliate themselves to the All India Trade Union Congress and to promote through that body the policy and programme of the Congress Party. However, the Communists in control of the All India Trade Union Congress were not about to let go their hold, however discredited they had been on account of their role towards the Quit India movement. In the circumstances, the labour leaders in the Congress felt the urgent need of forming a new central trade union organisation.

On 18 April 1947, the Secretary of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh wrote to all the nationalist-minded trade union leaders in the country pointing out the anti-national and anti-labour role the All India Trade Union Congress had played and proposed that a meeting be held on May 3 and 4, 1947 at Delhi for a frank appraisal of the exist-
ing situation and for taking the necessary steps to protect and promote the interests of both the country and the workers then on the threshold of freedom. The Delhi branch of Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh acted as the Reception Committee.

The Conference held a two-day session. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, President of the Central Board of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh presided. Acharya J.B. Kripalani, a veteran Congressmen and Gandhian, who was then President of the Congress inaugurated the Conference. Among the prominent labour leaders present were Gulzarilal Nanda, Khandubhai Desai and S.R. Vasavada.

Attention was drawn to the role of the Communists by Gulzarilal Nanda, on behalf of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh. He said that the policies pursued by the All India Trade Union Congress under the communist leadership which functioned in its name, stood in sharp and total conflict with their aims. He also said that the urgent need of the moment was therefore to provide machinery for coordinating the scattered forces of those who were in fundamental opposition to the communists in their approach to labour matters.

In his presidential address, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel dwelt at length on the debt the trade union movement and the All India Trade Union Congress in particular, owed to Congressmen and explained how a new situation had arisen making it necessary for a new labour organisation to be formed without further delay. He also said that the Communist labour leaders, in their opposition to the Government had no regard for national welfare.
The Conference then adopted the constitution of the Indian National Trade Union Congress. The labour movement of Gujarat had changed beyond recognition from 1917 to 1947. In 1917, Mahatma Gandhi was an active and forceful participant in it. In 1947, he had ceased to have an active interest in most things, except truth and non-violence.

From the first uncertain steps taken by the bank of the Sabarmati river near Ahmedabad, grew the Majoor Mahajan. The Mahajan in turn inspired the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh.

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated on the 30th of January 1948. The All India Congress Socialist Party by its very formation demonstrated that left national reformism was obliged to have recourse to new and more cunning methods of action against the growing influence of the Communist Party among the masses. The Congress socialist party was generous in its promises to set up an Indian Independent Socialist state to socialise the whole economy and even to collectivise agriculture.

The weakening of the ranks of the Communist Party and the adherents of the left trade unions through numerous arrests led to the fact that during the second period of the strike, a number of gross mistakes were made and some of the left leaders of the workers went so far as to proclaim the necessity of organising purely Communist trade unions. During the summer months of 1929, the communist policy in India underwent a significant change in conformity with changes in policy of the advisers of the movement in Great
Britain and elsewhere in Europe. A carefully worded declaration published in the various communist organs deprecated the former direct attacks on the compromising right-wing and criticism of Mahatma Gandhi's doctrines, for the reason that these provoked retaliation. It further said that, in view of the sure approach of an international crisis that would envelop India, energies must be concentrated on unifying communists, socialists, peasants, students and labour groups into a single united left front capable by virtue of the support of the masses, of directing Congress policy by pressure from below instead of control from above when the crisis broke out and of confronting the right-wing leaders with the alternative of adopting a radical programme or suffering defeat. The success made by the communists of their infiltration caused the resignation of four leading Congress Socialists, Masani, Ashoka Mehta, Lohia and Achyut Patwardhan from the Socialist Party Executive. Provoking and a public protest against communist domination. In a press statement, these socialist leaders declared that communist infiltration had gone very far and was interfering with the free initiative and development of the national movement. They also declared that communism was a disruptive force and under the control of the Soviet Government.

The International Labour Organisation was set up to correlate and coordinate the views and wishes of workers, managements and concerned Governments of the country. This had led to everlasting and ever increasing friendship between the International Labour Organisation and the Textile Labour Association.
The Textile Labour Association established a Maternity Home in 1943. A dispensary to create health consciousness was at work from 1925.

Thus, we see that Ahmedabad played the key role in the labour movement of Gujarat and most of the labour leaders were associated with this city. The leftist ideology also interacted with the Mahajan and the trade union movement got affected by it. The labour movement of Gujarat was a vehicle of social change along with economic changes.

In conclusion, we can say that the year 1917 saw a violent and a non-violent revolution in the world. April 17, 1917 was the beginning of the Satyagraha in India and also the beginning of the non-violent revolution. November 7, 1917 was the beginning of the violent revolution in Russia. The non-violent revolution was led by Mahatma Gandhi and the violent revolution was led by the Communists. These two concepts clashed in Ahmedabad.

Thus, it was inevitable that from 1917 to 1947, there should have been a clash between the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association and the Communist Unions. The fact that in Ahmedabad, despite all that the communist leaders could do to decry the Mahajan, the latter went from strength to strength and showed the essential vitality of the Gandhian approach. It was built on the Indian ethos as exemplified by satyagraha.

The Textile Labour Association remained outside the All India Trade Union Congress from the very beginning and this was never liked by the Communists. The first world congress of the Communists International, held in Moscow in
April 1919 had some strong words to say about Mahatma Gandhi whose philosophy of action by then had become known world-wide. It said that Gandhism was becoming more and more an ideology directed against mass revolution and it must be strongly combated by communism.

The 5th Congress of the Communist International held in 1924 went a step further and gave the Indian Communists a direction. It said that the Indian communists must bring the trade union movement under their influence and they must reorganise it on a class basis and purge it of all alien elements. Thus, this was in sharp contrast to the Gandhian principle which Mahatma Gandhi articulated. Mahatma Gandhi said that his ideal was that capital and labour should supplement and help each other.

The All India Trade Union Congress was keeping a watch on the Textile Labour Association. The All India Trade Union Congress could not succeed in making the trade unions of the country follow the Gandhian objectives, means and methods, given the political orientation of its leaders and therefore the Textile Labour Association remained outside the All India Trade Union Congress all along, until, on the eve of independence, the Indian National Trade Union Congress was formed with the blessing of Mahatma Gandhi.

The Communists strongly opposed the Textile Labour Association and Mahatma Gandhi. The Communists boasted that they alone had the right to fight for the proletariat. They believed in Marxist doctrines and they could not tolerate Mahatma Gandhi taking the workers of Ahmedabad under his shelter. The Communists were indeed jealous and full of anger...
for all that Mahatma Gandhi and the Textile Labour Association stood for.

An important communist leader who did not like Mahatma Gandhi and the Textile Labour Association was Sripad Anant Dange. According to him, the Gandhian trade unionism had thrown overboard certain of its principles because the working class refused to accept their line of division and disruption. Further, the communists adhered to and effectively brought the questions of national central organisation, of international solidarity and of political outlook to the workers.

S.A.Dange's charges have been ably refuted by an objective writer, Dr. Paresh Majmundar. Majmundar noted that since the All India Trade Union Congress never subscribed to non-violent non-cooperation, in order ultimately to cooperate with employers in building up industries with the national perspective, it would not be correct to decry the Textile Labour Association for not affiliating itself with the All India Trade Union Congress. The Textile Labour Association had, therefore, either to convert the All India Trade Union Congress to its ideology or create a national organisation in accord with its distinct methods and viewpoints.

Majmundar added that slowly the Textile Labour Association created its replica in Bombay, Indore, Baroda and other places, established a national union of textile workers in 1931, created the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Santh in 1937 and established the Indian National Trade Union Congress in 1947 when the time for it was ripe, i.e. when Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy had vindicated itself at Ahmedabad.
However, we see that the Communists were bitter because the working conditions for the workers were quite bad. A senior officer of the Textile Labour Association said that during the 1930's, the task of the Communists was to call out for strikes in order to crush the Textile Labour Association and the task of the Textile Labour Association was one of breaking them. Thus, the Textile Labour Association had a steady course despite the turbulent atmosphere in the industry leading to frustration among the communists.

When the communists joined the British in their war efforts, the Textile Labour Association came into prominence. The communists were shown up as betrayers of India's struggle for freedom.

On behalf of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, attention was drawn to the role of the Communists by Gulzarilal Nanda. He said that the bulk of the working class was opposed to the political philosophy of the Communists. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who was the President of the Central Board of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, said that in their opposition to the government, the communist labour leaders had thrown away all regards for national welfare.

The setting up of the International Labour Organisation gave an international complexion to the labour problem. The Trade Union Act of 1926 recognised trade unions as legal associations, laid down conditions for registration and regulation of trade union activities, secured their immunity, both civil and criminal, from prosecution for legitimate activities but put some restrictions on their political activities.
Finally, we can say that the rise of the Communist movement in India in the 1920s lent a militant and revolutionary content to the trade union movement. The 4th Congress of the Communist International sent a message to the All India Trade Union Congress not to be content with fair day's wages for a fair day's work but to fight for ultimate goal of overthrow of capitalism and imperialism. Further, the Indian Communists were urged to organise the trade union movement on a class basis and purge it of all alien basis. Giving a thrust and definite direction to Leftist Trade Union Movement in Gujarat was an array of remarkably dedicated leaders. Notable among them are Dhanwant Oza, Chandubhai Patel, Chandra Shankar Bhatt, Jaswant Thakar, Noor Mohamad Sheikh and Keshavji Vaghela - all men of a very high stature.

During 1926-27, the All India Trade Union Congress was divided into two groups called the reforming and the revolutionary groups also labelled as the Geneva - Amsterdam group and the Moscovite group, the former wanting the All India Trade Union Congress to be affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) with headquarters at Amsterdam and the latter desiring affiliation with the Red Labour Union organised from Moscow. The Communist thinking seemed to carry greater influence. During 1928, the country witnessed unprecedented industrial unrest. The strikes were inspired more by political ideas than immediate economic demands. The Communist journal "Kranti" said that there was no peace until capitalism was over-thrown. On the question of affiliation to an international labour body too the
Communist viewpoint prevailed and the All India Trade Union Congress was affiliated to the Pan-Pacific Secretariat and to the Third International at Moscow. In protest the moderate group withdrew from the All India Trade Union Federation in 1929.

Alarmed at the increasing strength of the trade union movement and its control under extremist hands, the Government of India sought to contain its activities by legislative restrictions. A Public Safety Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly in 1928, but could not get majority support and had to be issued in the form of an ordinance in 1929. The Trade Disputes Act (1929) provided, among other provisions, the compulsory appointment of Courts of Enquiry and Conciliation Boards for settling industrial disputes, made strikes illegal in public utility services like Postal Service, Railways, Water and Electricity Departments unless each individual worker planning to go on strike gave an advance notice of one month to the administration, and, above all, forbade trade union activities of coercive or purely political nature and even sympathetic strikes.

The Second World War brought another era of rising prices and lagging behind wages. The year 1940 witnessed many strikes, more so because the trade unions could not remain indifferent to political developments. In September 1940, the All India Trade Union Congress adopted a resolution disavowing any sympathy for imperialism or fascism. It resolved that participation in a war, which will not result in the
establishment of freedom and democracy in India, will not benefit India, much less will it benefit the working class.

M.N. Roy the revolutionary Communist turned Radical Humanist leader never linked Gandhian approach in labour movement. He seceded from the All India Trade Union Congress and formed a pro-Government Union called the Indian Federation of Labour; the Government responded by sanctioning to the loyal organisation a grant of Rs.13,000 p.m. The section of the All India Trade Union Congress under Communist influence also showed a pro-Government stance after the Soviet Union joined the war on the side of the Allied Powers. During the Quit India movement in August 1942, the nationalist wing of the All India Trade Union Congress suffered the most, the Communist Wing having declared in favour of the official Labour - Management - Government Conciliation formulae.

Inspite of the Communists getting thoroughly discredited and isolated for their pro-British stance, the nationalist leaders failed to capture the leadership of the All India Trade Union Congress. Consequently in 1944, national leaders led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, organised the Indian National Trade Union Congress. Thus, the advent of independence saw the polarization of trade unionism on the basis of political ideology.

Thus, we see that the trade union movement of Gujarat from 1917 to 1947 was an epoch-making event of modern Indian history with all its ups and downs. It set
an example before the rest of the country that given the determination of the workforce and supplemented by an able leadership, the workers can achieve their goals and lead a respectable life.

However, the application of the Textile Labour Association model elsewhere was not without its pitfalls. In 1932, the workers of New Shorrock Mills, Nadiad struck work seeking their right to form a Majoor Mahajan on the Textile Labour Association model. Workers representatives visited Ahmedabad to study the working of the Textile Labour Association. This was resented by the management and they were thrown out of employment. Consequently there was a general strike in the mill which lasted six months. S. R. Vasavada was summoned back from Indore. Other Textile Labour Association leaders like Keshavji Vaghela and Somnath Dave threw their lot in support of the strike. Meetings were regularly held at Santram Temple, Nadiad. Leaflets were issued. Oath was taken and the Textile Labour Association sanctioned Rs. 23000 for supporting the Nadiad strike. This money was spent in supplying food oil, cereals, etc. to workers. This was a mistake and contrary to Gandhian concept of self-reliance through alternative work during the strike. The workers thus became parasitic and dependent upon external support. Their morale broke and the strike failed.

But soon thereafter, the mill owners recognised the right of workers and the Mahajan was formed at Nadiad. The movement spread fast and Mahajans were formed in Petlad, Baroda, Surat, Bhavnagar, Kadi, Kalol, Siddpur, Navsari, Khambat and Viramgam. Most princely states of Kathiawad however did not permit the formation of any trade unions.
within their states. Somnath Dave and S.R. Vasavada were detained and despatched back from Wankaner station itself. It is only after independence when princely states were integrated with the Indian Union that trade unions could be formed there.

We can thus safely conclude that following the tenets of Mahatma Gandhi, Majoor Mahajans rendered exemplary services to the industrial workers of Gujarat and Madhya Bharat thereby ensuring lasting industrial peace culminating into the formation of the first ever Textile Workers Federation at National level.
FOOT NOTES


2. Desai, Mahadev Haribhai, Righteous Struggle (a Chronicle of Ahmedabad Textile Labour's fight for justice) Ahmedabad 1951 Chapter II.


5. Ibid p.5.

6. Ibid p.5.


   A biographical and historical study, Ahmedabad 1993 p.78


11. Hingorani, Anand T., Capital and Labour by M.K. Gandhi

   Bombay 1970, p.37

