

N.S. Bhangoo, Secretary General (AIREC), Delhi

Name	N.S. Bhangoo, Secretary General (AIREC), Delhi.
Date of Interview	5th Oct. 2002
Time	Afternoon to evening.
Place	At his residence in East Delhi.
Context	He seemed a simple Sikh gentleman and honest and not interested in power or position. He was interested in his category and larger struggle to get a better deal for the railway workers.
Interviewers	Anil Rajimwale, Krishna Jha, Bobby Poulouse.

Biographical Sketches

Bhangoo was born on March 6th 1935 at district Gujarawala in west Punjab i.e. today's Pakistan. He narrated how his childhood was and how he did his graduation in science and joined railways as an apprentice block maintainer in Ferozpur in 1956. He narrated his experiences in Ferozpur after which he came to Delhi in 1960. One of the main reasons for his coming into rail trade unionism was the treatment meted out by the rail board to his category of employees. He said his being a technical category the recognized unions leaders did not understand the nitty-gritty of their troubles and did do much for them. Thus when for ten long years there was no promotion for him or his colleagues there was resentment in the staff. There was no overtime either he said for them. And sometimes they had to work for 24 hours at a stretch. It was a very frustrating situation. They also formed an Association of Indian Railway Signal and Telecom Staff in 1966 with its headquarters in Delhi.

Transcript Summary

He began by saying that he was born on March 6th 1935 at district Gujarawala in west Punjab i.e. today's Pakistan. He narrated how his childhood was and how he did his graduation in science and joined railways as an apprentice block maintainer in Ferozpur in 1956. He narrated his experiences in Ferozpur after which he came to Delhi in 1960. One of the main reasons for his coming into rail trade unionism was the treatment meted out by the rail board to his category of employees. He said his being a technical category the recognized unions leaders did not understand the nitty-gritty of their troubles and did do much for them. Thus when for ten long years there was no promotion for him or his colleagues there was resentment in the staff. There was no overtime either he said for them. And sometimes they had to work for 24 hours at a stretch. It was a very frustrating situation. The situation he said was such that though the telcom and signal department were assigned a vital role in running the railways they remained anonymous and thus were never looked after by any of the recognized unions or the management. They also formed an Association of Indian Railway Signal and Telecom Staff in 1966 with its headquarters in Delhi. Bhangoo because of his activities he said was made the zonal secretary and then he was made the general secretary of the organization. In 1970 Bhangoo said he was made the secretary general of the All India Railway Employees Confederation (AIREC). He tried but says that the confederation did not get recognition however despite this he along with others organized several struggles which he explained in detail. He said he organised a unique strike which nobody had done till then i.e. called the 'work to rule' strike i.e. the telecom and signal staff worked all things according to the rule book. This created utter chaos because the railways like everything else in this country never followed or usually went according to any rules thus when they did so the whole rail system went out of gear. This struggle he said was launched in 26th Nov. 1973. It caused huge delays in the railways. The method was effective instantaneously and the government conceded. Bhangoo says for the preparations and running of the strike he toured the whole country. He says on 16th February 1974 a decision was taken to start the same form of strike 'work to rule' again all over the country. The AIRF sent a message to the convention to have joint programme. Even the organized unions realized its no use ignoring the category unions. Bhangoo explained how despite this the recognized unions continued to ignore them and even the settlement after 1974 strike was not great as far as category unions were concerned. He was not happy with George Fernandes' dragging the strike. He revealed that even the rail minister Madhu Dandavate ignored their demands and they launched a three-day dharna against him. He explained how after the 1974 strike the AIRF continued to ignore the category unions and let the NCCRS die so Bhangoo

made the NCCR. In 1981 Bhangoo said that he organized a massive demonstration in Delhi before the parliament on their issues. He narrated the various movements he organized after that also. The Confederation i.e. AIREC is still alive he says and he is still in its leadership.