

Friends of FMS - February 2025

# **Faridabad Majdoor Samachar : Communist Possibilities from Self-Critique**

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**Dedicated to our tireless and mirthful  
comrade and friend, Sher Singh ji**

The strangeness of the world kept bereaving me  
Day after day, slowly, I moved away from others  
- Munir Niyazi

I had set out all alone towards my destination but  
Others kept joining in, the caravan kept on growing  
- Majrooh Sultanpuri



Faridabad Majdoor Samachar's editor, Comrade Sher Singh, printed the first issue of the newspaper in 1982. The last copy of the newspaper came out in February 2020, and the very next month the Covid lockdown was imposed. This is a very long period. Even after these 38 years, Sher Singh ji<sup>1</sup> continued compiling earlier articles and distributing them in the form of booklets, books, and e-books, as well as attempting communication with workers through WhatsApp. And if we talk about the period before these 38 years, then in 1975, right from the beginning of the state of internal Emergency in the country,<sup>2</sup> Sher Singh ji left his studies of International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University and joined the Maoist movement. It is not an easy task to put this long a period into a single account.

The years spent with him have given us not only many lessons, but also led to many adventures. In this article, we are presenting briefly, from his perspective and from the

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<sup>1</sup> "Ji" is a particle added to the end of names to indicate respect.

<sup>2</sup> A period from 1975-1977 in which a state of emergency was declared in response to political and labor unrest; more below.

perspective of his times, the journey of him and his many groups - "kamunist kranti", "Collectivities", and most importantly, "Faridabad Majdoor Samachar."

# 1. Initial period

Sher Singh was born in 1951 in Haryana's Bhiwani district, in a village called Sandwa. Once while discussing his childhood, he said that there was an atmosphere of love and affection in the house and village. Life was sheltered from the outside world. The family was dependent on farming, and his father was in the army. Being the son of the family, Sher Singh ji was sent to study in King George School, Belgaum (Karnataka), where he spent his childhood playing football, watching movies, roaming around, but also keeping his shoes polished, his clothes neat and clean, and learning to speak with polish. Referring to his experiences in the "so-called education system" during the 1960s and 1970s, Sher Singh ji says that despite not being associated with any particular type of ideology, such inexplicable situations were emerging in the public sphere that raising various kinds of questions was a common thing (Radical Notes 2012). From there he went on to study technology at the

Birla Institute of Technology, Pilani (Rajasthan), chemical engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu), and then international relations at JNU (Delhi). The whole process, he says, was pulling him towards becoming an "expensive cog in the machine."

Sher Singh ji felt dissatisfied with the mainstream opposition parties and ideas during the declaration of internal emergency in 1975 (Radical Notes 2012). Can this be attributed only to the atmosphere of open thinking, which was cut off from politics? Was there no connection to ideology? If so, why did Sher Singh ji try to join the Maoist movement? He said that at that time the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party was seen as the "real opposition", and that, especially among university students in the cities, there was a lot of Maoist propaganda about the Naxalbari movement.

Anyway, it is worth mentioning here that Sher Singh ji not only jumped out from the factory line of "cogs" but also jumped out of all the circumstances of his life. He then adopted the role of a "professional revolutionary" for the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party. That is, he worked full time as an "organizer" in villages and the jungle. It seems that in college and in university, Sher Singh ji either lost his taste for football and film, or his attention was pulled towards the other serious subjects in which he immersed himself.

Here perhaps we should ask whether the enthusiasm of students for armed protest in villages and jungles was a sign of their distance from the struggles of industrial workers? Perhaps one reason for this could be that the major communist parties considered, and still consider, India to be a "semi-feudal," "semi-colonial" system. But behind this theory, there is also a rift between urban industrial workers and middle class rebels. The city of Delhi was surrounded by Faridabad, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Kanpur, and many

other industrial areas. Nevertheless, in that period and atmosphere, how can we understand why Sher Singh ji thought that the “real fight” was taking place only in the villages and jungles?



## 2. 1975-1980

Leaving behind a future with family-friends-being an expensive cog, Sher Singh ji moved about in the far flung areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh on behalf of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). In the cities, the state was repressing the party ruthlessly, so within the party there was an atmosphere of secrecy. Questions were not asked. On the other hand, in the rural areas, the party was working overtime, in the absence of agents of the state, to turn the educated and unemployed into "professional revolutionaries". Sher Singh ji became "déclassé," that is, he learned to reject the habits of his social class, and to "go among the people." During this period he gained a lot of experience roaming around in nature with other companions, drinking water from the river, hunting, etc.

While doing this, he also came to know that the party was actually divided into many

groups and factions. In analysing this, we can say that there was a fierce competition going on between the many different interests within the party itself. Because the party saw itself as a coalition of many sections like workers, farmers, tribals, dalits, etc, the difference in social background must have made these conflicts inevitable. But it does not seem wrong to assume that this problem could also have been due to the statist, bureaucratic structure of the party, in which an atmosphere of secrecy and silence on questions predominated.

However, after the death of Mao Zedong in 1978, the divisions in the party grew further, and Deng Xiaoping's faction emerged victorious. "Suddenly in 1979, it was felt that work should be done among the workers in the industrial sector, not in the rural areas," explained Sher Singh ji. What does this "suddenly" mean? Sher Singh often did not tell the full story. Simplification was like a small weapon he carried with him to avoid getting caught in the clutches of difficult and complex problems. But, we might surmise that perhaps

this was a sign of the disintegration of his existing organization. They may have realized that the fruits of hyperactivity that they were looking for in the rural context were not likely to develop. On this, a German comrade says, "Sher Singh found that in fact the 'tribals' were wage-laborers working for the timber mafia." (AWW 2020)

Or perhaps by "suddenly" he meant that the decision was not his personal one, but was taken by his group suddenly and without any clear reason, which the others had to accept. So he went to Gwalior, Indore, and the surrounding factory areas and took his activities to the workers and students.

From the accounts of that time, it appears that the mill workers were also grappling with the divisions that were taking place within the Communist parties of India at the national level. "I worked with some elderly workers of Gwalior's Jiyaji Cotton Mills who had moved from the CPI to CPM and then later to the C.P.M.L." He says that before the Emergency,

the mill workers of Indore had supported the leader of the CPI and helped elect him to the Parliament. After the CPI supported the Emergency, those workers abandoned it. Here we see that not only was the militant energy of the workers being drawn into parliamentary politics by the unions, but the “anti-parliamentary” communist groups who were conducting "real opposition" away from the cities were also being drawn towards the cities which were the realm of parliamentary politics. In such a situation, Sher Singh ji remained active among these workers through study circles. Discussions on "a little bit of Marx and a lot of Lenin" took place. There was a booklet named "Mazdoor ka Ka-Kha-Ga" (*The Worker's ABC*), which presented a materialist philosophy of history for the workers. It seems that during this period Sher Singh ji got acquainted with the tactics of central trade unions in cahoots with mill managements, and his activities were directed towards forming independent unions and organizations of the workers.

While reading about Lenin and the Russian conditions before the revolution, he realized that the Leninists of India saw themselves in a role similar to the Narodniks. Seeing this view in their organisational structure, Sher Singh and his comrades prepared a programme for the establishment of the "Marxist-Leninist Majdoor (Wage Workers') Party", in which a worker organisation could be made the base. All activities were undertaken in secrecy, because now the danger was not only from the state, but also from the censure of the party. Yet, perhaps there must have been some trust in the cause as well as in senior comrades, because in due course he sent this proposal to a senior party leader based in Delhi. The leader - who had been active in the CPI, then CPM, then CPI-ML for 40 years - was taken aback. Calling it insubordination, the party ended its relationship with Sher Singh ji.

In the process of establishing his foothold in Indore, Gwalior, Bhopal and other industrial areas of Madhya Pradesh, Sher Singh ji found that the industries there were actually in a

dying state. What a strange experience it must have been ! As soon as he discovered that the social upheaval was in the industrial areas rather than in the rural areas he realized that the industrial workers themselves were witnessing a phase of industrial decline. For example, the Jiyajirao Cotton Mills of Gwalior, run by the Birla family,<sup>3</sup> were established in 1921. By the 1980s, the company was facing serious problems. In 1992, the Electricity Board alleged that the company owed Rs 60 crore in bills and was not paying. The company was shut down. (Till date the company has not settled accounts with 8000 workers, the electricity department, and many banks). It should also be remembered that the decade of 1970-80 was not only a period of global recession but also of widespread labour unrest. However, at that time Sher Singh ji's attention turned towards Faridabad. Not only did it appear to be more prosperous industrially, but also its proximity to the country's largest city and capital further increased the attraction towards Faridabad in his Leninist thinking.

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<sup>3</sup> One of India's oldest and most powerful industrial conglomerates.

That is why, with his ties to the party broken,  
Sher Singh ji went to Faridabad.

### **3. 1980-1984**

Faridabad invited Sher Singh ji's radical experiments as an excellent laboratory. This industrial city that developed after 1947 had a lot of different kinds of factories as compared to the earlier cities that had only one or two mills: not just textiles, iron, chemicals, but also electronics, shoes, automobiles, tools, etc., and running on capital invested from within the country and abroad. In this city with well-planned housing for managers and only empty space along railway tracks and canals for workers to build their huts, reports of workers' actions in countless factories were common from the 60s through to the 80s. It is interesting to see the decisive role of perspective Sher Singh ji had made a short trip to Faridabad even at the time of the Emergency, but failed to see much to be done, unlike now in 1981.

The rejection of the central trade union federations, which Sher Singh ji had seen in



their final stages briefly in Indore-Gwalior-Bhopal, was taking on a much greater intensity on a larger scale in Faridabad. Factories had become the arena for clashes between police and workers, and the role of central trade unions in this clash had become very clear. Parties and unions, whether they supported or opposed the internal emergency, came directly under the scrutiny of the workers, and acts like forced-sterilization and demolition of slums show that during the emergency the state and the managerial class directly attacked the working class. Later, unions of 80 factories broke their ties with the central trade union federations and a "Workers' Struggle Committee" was formed, under which huge processions and demonstrations of workers were taken out in every corner of Faridabad city. On 17 October 1979, the police fired bullets on a procession of about ten-thousand workers, chasing after them even as they dispersed, secretly disposed of the victims bodies, and destroyed evidence. There was immense anger against the police among the working class people living in

Faridabad. This event showed the weakening grip of the parliamentary trade unions on the workers' groups and their activities. One can only imagine how much fuel this environment must have given to Sher Singh ji's resolve.

At that time, "awakening" class consciousness among the workers was an important objective of Sher Singh ji's activities. He was also organizing "study circles" among the workers of Madhya Pradesh based on selected readings. At the same time, it seems that the workers also had a deep desire to be acquainted with "revolutionary ideas". Sher Singh ji tells us that when a senior leader used to organize such meetings in his early years, the workers used to listen very attentively even after returning from work. Some workers of that period sat together and finished all three parts of Karl Marx's "Capital" in the time left after work, Sher Singh ji once recounted.

The steps taken by Sher Singh ji during this period, the people he established contact with, and the activities he carried out with them

were based on the program of the "Marxist-Leninist Majdoor (Wage-Workers') Party", which was aimed at raising a "real" workers' organization. We do not have the documents of this program now, but Sher Singh ji sums it up in the following manner-

- trade unions are crucial for worker organization. Removing managerial stooges from them and installing honest, worker-friendly representatives in them,
- exposing fake communists,
- making workers aware of the oppressive nature of global imperialism,
- spreading materialistic philosophy among workers

It can be said that even though during this period his focus shifted from rural areas to industrial centers, he saw his fundamental role as that of an intellectual vanguard to the workers.

When in 1982 he brought out the first issue of "Faridabad Majdoor Samachar", the background and testing criteria for that effort was this program. Here an interesting thing to note is that Sher Singh ji's intention was that the name of the newspaper should be only "Majdoor Samachar", but due to some technical, legal reasons he had to keep the name as "Faridabad Majdoor Samachar".

Even after many years, they continued to call it "Majdoor Samachar" in common parlance, but the addition of Faridabad to the identity of the newspaper gave it a local characteristic which superseded the immediate desire of the creator for universalism and gave it a solid ground of identification.

This first series, which began in 1982, ended with the last newspaper in April 1984. We do not have copies of these newspapers. But some important material from this period is available in the booklet "Majdoor Andolan ki Ek Jhalak" (A Glimpse of the Workers' Movement)

published in March 1993. Though this booklet is mostly based on the issues of the new series from 1987 to 1993, the editor has added some things from the old series which throw light on the circumstances of that time, especially in manufacturing units such as Gedore Tools, Escorts-Ford, Bata shoes, etc. Detailed description of these can be found elsewhere, so we will not go into the details here, but will try to provide a glimpse of what went on during this period.

When we look at these reports, it appears that most of the discussions are about company directors, managers, union leaders, police, administration etc. There is an attempt to not only expose the oppressive nature of these capitalist forces, but also to echo the hatred that the working class has for them. On the other hand, the workers are described as oppressed, struggling but tired, and are repeatedly advised to stay alert, organize, etc. In this era of technological advancements and massive layoffs, dismissed workers, workers without wages are often presented with idioms

akin to "wasted", "fly-swatters", etc. This is clearly the language of the intellectual vanguard. The leader considers himself aware of the grave problems and their root-causes, and keeps warning the workers about those problems. In such a situation, administrative appeals, letters to mainstream newspapers, attempts to use systemic tools to expose their uselessness etc. were widely adopted and found useless (even in their uselessness).

At the same time, looking a bit deeper, something else too emerges. During this period, apart from Sher Singh ji, Majdoor Samachar could engage in these activities only with the help of militant workers from companies like Gedore, Bata, Escorts, East India..... So when we think of this vanguardist character of their activities, we should not forget that there were intimate bonds developing among this group of workers with Sher Singh ji. It seems that the monthly became a medium for the workers to express their frustrations and anger about their lives. The newspaper became a supplement to their

militant activities on the shopfloor, trying to bring together massive groups of disenchanting workers against not only the floundering management, but also the unions who acted in managerial interests and had become a sort of self-serving agency posing as workers' representatives. And as it often happens, it was not possible for these militant workers to continue merely with frustration for long. A time came when not only that cynical ranting and railing against the management, but also the practice which had developed around it had to be rethought. That is why Sher Singh ji says that in 1984 this effort ended due to many difficulties and the newspaper series was stopped. There were also successes in the sense that by continuously exposing the management, and increasing dialogue among the workers, there was more systematic repression of militant workers' groups, as well as workers more broadly. Jokingly, Sher Singh ji says that they had to stop the paper as a result of their success.

Apart from this, another important thing seems to have emerged during this period. On the one hand, we saw the perspective of an intellectual vanguard, for which understanding reality by reading, that is, understanding and putting into practice the thoughts of famous revolutionaries, is the starting point. On the other hand, a different perspective from the workers' side also presents itself in this period. In weekly meetings with workers of different factories, Sher Singh ji used to urge the workers to raise the demand for a "truly representative" union. He used to say that the workers should pay the union fee, and then pressure the unions to work in their interests. Despite these vociferous suggestions, half of the workers of these factories did not pay the union fee. The workers had a different view about unions by and large. According to them, dishonesty was at the root of the union system. To run a union, the following are necessary:

1. Goons/Hooligans/musclemen
2. A friendly relationship with someone in the management



### 3. Blessings of someone in the police-administration-government

On the basis of their experiences, the workers understood that unions were not organisations in the interest of workers. Even during this period, when Sher Singh's attention was focused on exposing the ruling apparatus, at exposing the deceit and selfishness of the unions, we find in the October 1983 issue of Mazdoor Samachar-

“The hunger strike of two sacked Ford workers that began on September 23 caused a great stir for a week. Ford workers showed great unity and workers from other Escorts (partnership company) plants also began to take a stand. (The hunger strike and support lasted for 8 days.)”

At that time, a question that emerged from this experience seemed urgent for Sher Singh ji – is the trade union really an organisation of the workers? In this question, the initial idea of the

Marxist-Leninist wage labour party seems to collapse.

## **4. 1984-1990 Beginning**

After the initial years of failure and success in Faridabad, Sher Singh ji once again immersed himself in books for reflection, as he recounts. Simultaneously, he engaged in dialogues with numerous communist organisations in India and abroad, primarily those that were thinking about working among labourers outside the parliamentary framework. It appears that during this period, his meetings with workers decreased or perhaps stopped altogether. Many of the workers who used to attend weekly meetings had become targets of company management, some had their salaries withheld, and others seemed to have returned to their villages. In such circumstances, Sher Singh ji also set up his residence on a companion's farm, where arrangements were made for his stay and meals. This was a financially difficult time for him, but he mentions that during this period, he not only delved into Marxist thought but also established exchanges with other Marxists and sympathetic activists (whom he refers to as the "5 percenters"). He also got the

opportunity to play football with people he knew in the vicinity. For some time during this period, Sher Singh ji had to labour himself, translating articles for Reader's Digest for an agency in Delhi and working as a tutor. Perhaps this helped him get by at the time, but afterward, he never "worked" again, as he often proudly stated.

Once Sher Singh ji said that this was a period when he had to "drink water from every ghat (riverbank)." I believe he was referring to the next 8-10 years of his nomadic life—not just geographically nomadic but also ideologically and practically unstable. The Maoist-Marxist-Leninist propositions he had inherited no longer seemed viable to him, but rejecting a proposition is only half the journey, and the simpler part at that. What comes next? This is a very difficult question. Especially when one reaches the limits of the various methods widely prevalent at the time, one then has to move toward all sources of light in the darkness. Perhaps this was Sher Singh ji's situation at that time.

He mentions that the practical invalidation of Lenin's theory of imperialism, drawn from his own experience of organizing, encouraged him to revisit Marx's critique of political economy. At the same time, he felt the need to re-examine Lenin's debates on organizational forms. During this period, he became acquainted with some select organizations in India that considered India a capitalist country. He met members of the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) in Bhopal, activists of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (RSPI (ML)), and those who had split from it to form the Revolutionary Proletarian Platform (RPP). He visited the mining regions of central India and met the militant leader Shankar Guha Niyogi. These meetings around this time were motivated by an idea of creating an all-India organisation for wage-workers, along with an all-India newspaper. He also established contact with the International Communist Current (ICC), which was mainly active in Europe at the time, and had an internationalist outlook. In conversations with them, Sher Singh ji was encouraged to read the works of

Rosa Luxemburg, the martyred leader of the German workers. Unable to obtain her book *The Accumulation of Capital*, he copied important sections from a library and studied them.

It is clear here that Sher Singh ji was exploring all directions during these two years where he felt possibilities might emerge. However, his attention remained focused on that "5 percent" who played an activist role. During this time, reports of workers' activities in *Majdoor Samachar* were also less frequent. This seems to be a matter of inspiration, and at that time, theoretical questions seemed important to him for gaining inspiration. Luxemburg raised profound questions on Marx's critique of political economy, as he perceived it. The initial result of these efforts was the publication of an article in Hindi and English in 1986 titled "kamunist kranti" (Communist Revolution), which presented these new ideological experiments.

The conclusions drawn from this effort can be summarized as follows:

1. Feudal society was seen as a natural social formation where monetary transactions were minimal. In contrast, the global expansion of the East India Company, or the expansion of the world-market, spread monetary exchange on a large scale in the Indian subcontinent. Landlordism and other exploitative relationships based on monetary tax collection or the emergence of usury cannot be called feudal. Here, those communist programmes which link the conditions of the Indian subcontinent to feudal society are rejected.

2. Between feudal society (natural economy) and capitalist society (production of goods for the market through wage labor), they found it necessary to identify a distinct phase, which Marx called "simple commodity production." This phase is based on domestic production for personal use and limited trade of surplus, and it is in this process that primitive accumulation of capital and displacement of domestic production occur. According to the authors of "kamunist kranti", the failure to

understand this phase as a distinct social relationship is the reason why societies like India are still seen as feudal.

3. The third important point is that by the second half of the 19th century, the displacement of capitalists had already begun. Capital as private property, the property of a single capitalist, was on the verge of becoming an obsolete form of capital. Marx himself mentions that joint-stock companies not only outcompete capitalists in the market but also do not face the problems of private property. The authors of "kamunist kranti" argue that capital should be seen as a broader social relationship beyond the character of "private property," with new representatives like global corporations, state-owned companies, and private limited companies.

With these points in mind, Sher Singh ji and his companions resumed the distribution of Majdoor Samachar in 1986. Their group became identified with these propositions, and they sent their articles under the



name “kamunist kranti” to other activists. From 1986 to 1987, the outline of this reflection was irregularly distributed, and from 1987, the monthly distribution of the newspaper began regularly. With contributions from worker friends and comrades working in factories, the newspaper was printed, distributed, and other expenses were managed. At that time, around 650 newspapers were distributed monthly in Faridabad alone, which soon rose to a 1000. There were instances of clashes with management, goons, and the police; the comrades of Communist Revolution adopted the policy of taking these incidents to the workers and using them as a means of propaganda for the workers' cause. Alongside this, new goals were mapped out:

1. A call for workers to take self-organized steps.
2. Discussion on unions being representatives of capital.
3. A suggestion to form a "Global Workers' Communist Party."



*Friends from 'kamunist kranti' in the 1980s*

## 5. 1990 Beginning

By 1987, the propositions formulated by the comrades of the "kamunist kranti" based on their experiences and new readings proved to be fertile once again. The shift in their reading of the character of unions led to a sharper edge of critique from Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, which in turn helped them better understand the actions of unions in the present day. By this time, the turmoil seen in Faridabad over the past decade had reached a decisive turning point. Companies were sinking, and during this period of decay, the unions, along with the company administration and police, were bent on weakening the collective presence of the workers. This period's experience was presented by "kamunist kranti" in its explanation of "engineered strikes," which we will discuss in some detail here.

This was a time when 95% of workers in factories were permanent. Both the company and the law believed that workers were part of the company so long as it was operational.

However, at the same time, this period marked a global era of profound changes in productivity and production centers. Majdoor Samachar reports from Faridabad provide a firsthand account of these changes.

- Whether it's the case of Gedore Hand Tools -- which produced tools sold with vehicles by employing 3,500 workers -- whose German operators sold its shares in 1982 to a local shareholder, Jhalani -- who tried saving the sinking ship by borrowing 2.5 crore rupees from an industrial bank to install new machines,
- or whether it's about Bata, the shoe company, which, in 1983, with the union's consent, sought to extract more production from workers using new automatic lines,
- or whether it is about Escorts, a heavy vehicle manufacturer who, from 1988-90, with the help of the union, increased

production by 30% from the workforce by offering minor wage-hikes,

the common theme was this: a growing strain in the face of mounting challenges in the market, and attempts to increase productivity. The companies' crises deepened, with their main tactics being:

- Extracting more production from workers
- Firing workers
- Cutting wages
- Automation

And when these tactics failed, companies resorted to looting whatever they could of leftover materials and fleeing. In this entire process, unions played the role of either keeping the workers in the dark or clearing the way for the companies by managing workers' opposition when the curtain lifted.

In such a scenario, "engineered strikes" became a method for the unions to control the

workers opposition while management enacted these tactics.

When a group of workers is inside a factory, they hold a certain power. The factory, machines, raw materials, finished goods, and overall control are naturally under their control. A factory thus becomes a stronghold, and management is concerned with how to defeat this power of the workers. Traditionally, "strikes" were considered a display of workers' power, but during this period, strikes became a tool to separate workers from the factory. Numerous examples of these "engineered strikes" can be found in issues of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar from this period.

1979 – In the East India Textile Mill in Faridabad, workers fought over the trivial issue of a bonus increase from 18% to 19%, and a clash broke out between rival unions inside the factory, leading to a strike. Afterward, workers found themselves working with new machines, where one worker was producing four times the earlier product. Through the confusion and distractions created by such strikes, what

resulted in stead was the company's will to produce more imposed upon the workers.

“kamunist kranti” comrades found a new perspective to look at such incidents. It completely changed their relation to the events taking place around them.

1991, Thomson Press, one of the high-level presses operating in India, had been struggling to maintain its position in the market. A Majdoor Samachar report : "On March 21, a fight broke out inside the factory, which seemed provoked. Management benefited from this and the situation seemed to have been instigated by them." (Workers' News, May 1991)

In a number of other plants too such situations emerged where companies in dire straits announced 50% slash in salaries; the unions struck on behalf of workers, and gradually negotiated for “just 25% cuts,” and announced the same as a victory for the workers.

During changing industrial relations, it was not just about one or another union. A wide

transformation in industrial production occurred globally between 1970 and 1990. Millions of companies shut down, and many unions and union federations were openly colluding with managements. For instance, in Bombay, 60 textile mills shut down in just a decade, with 250,000 workers left protesting in vain. Union-led strikes were instrumental in bringing workers out of the mills for the management to then lock the mills down.

American communist Loren Goldner, writing about this process, observes, "'kamunist kranti' does not beat around the bush, they speak plainly. Their understanding of the issue is shocking: In the 19th century, strikes were workers' weapons, while in the 20th century, they have become management's weapons." (Goldner, 1998; more examples discussed therein)

When people today, especially those with an interest in history, talk about this period, they refer to it as a new era brought about by Reagan and Thatcher. It is widely agreed that during this time, not only did the entire



character of production systems change, but also, efforts to restructure production managed to dissolve the collective base of workers and dissolve their groups into the global market. Whether they were in steel and chemicals or auto manufacturing in America, coal mine workers in England, or textile mill workers in Bombay, this process was evident everywhere.

The "kamunist kranti" comrades, through their analysis of these experiences, tried to understand these events not as a defeat of the workers' side, but as a crisis within the class relation itself; unions were not defeated by capitalists, they had become a tool of capitalists. If unions proved not to be workers' organisations, as was earlier thought, but as self-serving, and worse, managerial instruments, then their dismantling had to be understood not as an attack on workers' strength per se but as necessary shifts caused by crises. In these shifts, as the relation between capital and workers changes, the older representational forms are no longer an obstacle facing workers. Their sharp reading of these experiences has helped us understand

the issues faced by workers during the restructuring of global capital.

In this regard, Sher Singh says: "The word 'strike' has evolved and now includes: ritual strikes, engineered strikes aimed at provoking workers, and actual strikes. Where spontaneous workers' strikes leave unions behind, it appears as something with a difference." (Radical Notes 2012)

Based on these experiences, the "kamunist kranti" comrades, through their continuous effort to understand reality in a new light, have helped us understand critical aspects of this emerging period, workers' issues, and the challenges they face. This sharp, nuanced understanding cannot be found elsewhere.

## 6. New vantage points in the 1990s

Looking at the details so far from a theoretical perspective, the journey of Sher Singh and Majdoor Samachar - "kamunist kranti" appears to have proceeded as follows:

- What was perceived as a sign of feudal society was, in reality, the breakdown of simple production and the widespread expansion of a money-based economy due to the growth of the global market. The Indian subcontinent had not experienced anything resembling feudalism—whether semi or full—for a long time. Therefore, the main communist parties in India were mistaken in their analysis.
- If there was no question of replacing the bootlicking leaders and parliamentarians with "real leaders," then there was also no question of replacing dishonest or

subservient unions in companies producing for the global market with genuine, worker-friendly unions. In this era, any union that became the representative of the workers would either be co-opted or turned against the workers.

- The real question is about workers asserting their own interests.

If national characteristics are not indicators of the revolutionary activities of the working class, then what is the basis? Based on experiences so far, Sher Singh completely moved away from his initial national perspective and began to view the struggles of the working class from an international or global standpoint. The global character of capital-wage-market is evident not only in the chain of production and reproduction but also in the importance of this global perspective in connecting with organizations from other countries. This was recognized by the comrades of "kamunist kranti" in Faridabad.

However, it seems that even by 1990, their perspective remained largely that of a vanguard of the workers. In the January-March 1990 issue of the quarterly "échanges" of the International Communist Current, an article from Majdoor Samachar (March 1989) was published, the summary of which we present here: 35,000 textile mill workers in Kanpur went on a rail-roko (rail blockade) strike. The railway line was blocked for 5 days, with 100 trains halted daily. According to a mainstream newspaper : "All the mill workers became leaders themselves, and the traditional union leaders were following their lead."

In response to this article, Dutch communist journalist Cajo Brendel wrote a letter asking: "We are quite familiar with workers determining their own steps, and of trade unions being organizations serving the interests of capital... In your article, you twice advise the workers on what they should do, instead of simply analyzing the steps they have taken in context. Why do you consider it appropriate to advise them? And secondly, why

do you want to create a global organisation of workers? In our understanding, any party, whether hierarchical or non-hierarchical, can only be a product of bourgeois society."

The comrades of "kamunist kranti" found the thrust of these questions contradictory to their activities and principles, which they communicated in a letter to the journal (January-March 1991). In response, they highlighted some key points: "The spontaneous activities of workers are significant for Marxists because they can sometimes lead workers to communist consciousness through clashes with reality, as seen in the Paris Commune or the formation of Soviets. Such steps encourage Marxist organisers, and we have had some success in informing workers about communist consciousness through events like the Paris Commune. Marxists are an integral part of the workers' movement. Bringing this consciousness to workers is a crucial task, and a global workers' revolution can only occur as a conscious step."

Alongside this, the editors published Brendel's next response: "We have some disagreements. I do not believe that workers take steps because they are 'Marxists.' Nor will they ever take steps for this reason. They take steps to defend their interests. I do not believe that communist consciousness will first be instilled in workers. But there is no doubt that the steps workers take to defend their interests can lead to such consciousness. Therefore, I believe our task is not to tell workers about the Paris Commune, etc., but to discuss their own steps and their circumstances."

Again in 1992 (January-March), a letter from "kamunist kranti" was published, stating: "Even today, the working-class movement in India has not found its independent space. The main reason for this is the specific conditions here (the predominance of the peasant-artisan class) and the absence of those who bring communist consciousness to the workers." The journal did not agree with these points, and with this the exchange ended..

It is important to note that what was published in "échanges" in January-March 1992 was a letter sent from India in December 1990. It seems that this exchange brought about an eventual change in the perspective of the "kamunist kranti" comrades, or at least it certainly helped them think about their positions in a new way. In the new series of Majdoor Samachar, there was a column called "Marxism," where debates with the "5 percenters," slogans, etc., were presented. It contained all kinds of abstract, expert-like language, which by 1993 began to seem like a waste of time to them. Perhaps this also meant that nothing substantial was coming out of these esoteric discussions, and perhaps other things seemed more important. Sher Singh ji mentions that he felt the need for a new language around this time. After 1993 this column was discontinued. At the same time, the newspaper size was increased to two pages (four sides). By December 1993, 4,000 copies of the newspaper were being distributed in Faridabad. The changes seen in this time were significant. The early 1990s were years of



global recession, the echoes of which were seen in Majdoor Samachar. The period after 1993 saw widespread and rapid automation. Sher Singh ji writes that the faces of both factories and workers changed significantly. The practice of keeping permanent workers in factory production almost disappeared. The earlier soft echoes of contract workers and casual workers, which were occasionally seen in Majdoor Samachar earlier, became the major and predominant note. The union structure, which seemed important from the 1980s to the 1990s, quickly moved into insignificance.

Looking through the issues of these years, we find that there were indeed remarkable changes in language and perspective. It does not seem as if the same editor from the 1980s was publishing the newspaper. Giving advice to workers—stopped. Lamenting the workers' fate—stopped. Using phrases like "wasted" or "fly-swatting" for workers—stopped. Continuous chanting of party-organization-nationwide-worldwide efforts—stopped.

Instead, it seems as if someone, sitting comfortably somewhere, is sharing their life experiences, good and bad, about work, about experiences outside work, without any incessant wailing about hardship. We can say that the painful, martyr-like attitude which today reads as a parody of leftists had disappeared. In this period, letters, stories, poetry, etc., written by readers were frequently published. Sher Singh ji mentions that after 1998, more space was given in the newspaper to what workers were doing and saying, and the newspaper's own voice was gradually toned down.

Earlier, we had seen that the question of inspiration for Majdoor Samachar's activities kept emerging in interesting and difficult turns. Much was lost, some was grasped. The earlier confidence in consciousness gradually faded into a creative doubt.

Since 1984, the comrades of "kamunist kranti" began meeting various kinds of people. They established contacts with many people across

the country and the world. But by the early 1990s, we see that their focus was only on the "5 percenters." They realized that the 95% had to be the primary inspiration for their activities. While many left parties, organizations, and groups claim to work for the 95% in some form, this often becomes a mere slogan when the activities of this 95% are not even considered in these discussions and programmes. It becomes a kind of populist politics that seems like a symptom of the crisis-ridden capitalist system.

Now, for Sher Singh, what was to come as inspiration had a new criterion: to be in harmony with the self-activity of the workers. For him, spreading or increasing consciousness among workers was less important than portraying the workers' own activities, their real consciousness, in a new language, to reach workers and other sympathetic people.

From the early 1990s, Sher Singh also interacted with several university students.

Some were from Delhi University, associated with a Maoist student organization, while others were from Jamia Millia Islamia, trained in film-making. It seems that differences in perspectives did not hinder exchanges here. Many of these people remained closely associated with the newspaper for a long time, and one can imagine how interesting this group must have been, with factory workers on one side and middle-class students on the other. Majdoor Samachar continued its work and took new directions. This gathering produced some interesting pamphlets during this period—"A Ballad Against Work" (1996), "Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy" (1997, which we have translated into Hindi), and "Self Activity of Wage Workers : A Critique of Representation and Delegation (1998). At the same time, Sher Singh traveled extensively with these friends—Garhwal-Kumaon, Odisha, Bombay—and they also played a lot of football together.



*Distributing FMS in Okhla Industrial Area*

## **7. The 21st Century - Visions of the New**

We have seen how Sher Singh ji, Majdoor Samachar, and "kamunist kranti" redefined their work by moving beyond the theoretical frameworks inherited from the past. In doing so, the question of inspiration for their work becomes crucial. This quest for inspiration continually reshapes the nature of the newspaper and their activities. It is often said—and sometimes as a critique—that Sher Singh and the newspaper he edits are "workerist." We won't delve into the definition of "workerism" here, but there is no doubt that a primary source of inspiration for them has been the workers' (for him) essential, spontaneous, and self-driven resistance to capitalism. However, to claim that this is the only source of inspiration for his work seems incorrect when we examine the facts.

First, it must be noted that after 1984, and especially after 1990, Sher Singh engaged in extensive correspondence with various activist groups (the "5 percenters"). Many of their good ideas were incorporated into his activities. Numerous debates and issues emerged from this exchange, which cannot be immediately labeled as "workerist." Any curious reader can open earlier issues, pamphlets, etc., to see this (the number of such articles is so vast that it's impossible to mention any specifically, but as an example, the question of nature and human society has been extensively discussed, particularly in relation to its inseparable connection with class society).

But there is another important reason why Majdoor Samachar cannot be simply called "workerist." Alongside detailing workers' activities, the newspaper is a meticulous chronicle of the industrial system spread across Delhi-NCR. Month by month, it documents the changes occurring here—the

birth and death of factories and industrial zones, technological shifts in production, and the fluctuations in workers' groupings, self-organisation, and their lives. If it strives to doggedly present the side of workers amidst (or ahead of) these materially real changes, it is because it sees itself not as confined to an academic endeavour look at material changes, but as a working-class intervention.

Thus, we see that the 21st century brings new energy to the work of Majdoor Samachar and "kamunist kranti." The shift in perspective that emerged from the breakdown of old structures in the 1990s led to the discovery of new ideas in the 2000s, which were immediately embraced, grasped, and tested. The transformation of temporary workers from the margins to the core working force in production, the radical changes in production due to technological advancements, the evolving character of factories and labor, the global inter-connectedness and expansion of production, and the diminishing role of



union structures in workers' activities—all these aspects of the new landscape and the rising discontent among workers are vividly captured in *Majdoor Samachar* in the 21st century.

Take, for instance, the massive factories of Maruti Suzuki and Honda. The experience of Faridabad, with companies like Escorts, JCB, and others, was turned upside down by companies like Maruti and Honda. A small town like Gurgaon became an "auto hub," a massive center for automobile production, with thousands of factories established not only to supply parts for these companies but also to global auto companies.

The 300-acre Maruti factory in Gurgaon, established in 1983, became a symbol of the collusion between politicians and the Indian capitalist class, which eventually failed. This led to partnership with the Japanese company Suzuki. By 1992, it was operational with 4,500 permanent workers and 2,000 staff. By 2000,

the company, with the help of unions, forced many workers out through a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS). After this, a large number of temporary workers were hired—both here and at the new Manesar plants established in 2006. These details were extensively covered in the June 2007 issue of *Majdoor Samachar*. By 2007, 2,200 cars were produced daily at the Gurgaon plant.

It is no coincidence that from 2007 onwards, *Majdoor Samachar* began to focus on the simmering unrest at Maruti Suzuki. As early as the August 2005 issue, FMS highlighted the explosive situation at Honda's two-wheeler factory in Manesar. Established in 2001, by 2005, production had significantly increased. Most of the work was done by "trainees" and contract workers, while permanent workers had slightly better conditions and less work pressure (later, management strategically widened the gap between permanent and temporary workers, a very common tactic detailed extensively in

Majdoor Samachar in its coverage of Gurgaon and Manesar). Temporary workers were a constant source of turmoil, directly affecting production, leading management to crack down by June. There were suspensions for minor issues and police stationed at the gates ! These details are covered extensively in the August 2005 issue, but the key point is that Majdoor Samachar was introduced to a new situation where a humongous factory relied heavily on a large group of temporary workers for intensely rapid and wide-scaled production. This wasn't limited to one factory, but affected the entire industrial area, as factories in this new system were interconnected through multiple channels. Thus, when major uprisings later occurred in companies like Maruti, Samsung, and Yamaha, Mazdoor Samachar provided detailed and insightful analyses for workers and other readers.

These capillaries extend not only from big factories into small ones but also pass through

every small and large level production unit, spreading across vast distances. This is evident in the numerous uprisings in small units during this period, which Majdoor Samachar amplified. The garment industry, electronics, metalworks, medical instruments, cardboard factories, furniture, etc.—all found a place for posterity in Majdoor Samachar. Often, an incident in one small or large factory would shake not just the entire industrial area but sometimes entire cities like Noida (FMS Mar 2013) or Bengaluru (FMS May 2016), or even the tea plantations in the hills of Kerala (FMS Nov 2015). Workers' spontaneous, leaderless actions became quite frequent and effective during this period, and Sher Singh ji and Majdoor Samachar were always eager and insightful in engaging with these events.

From experiences such as these, comrades working around Faridabad Majdoor Samachar tried a new organisational form which sought to converge around multiple points of contact in the Delhi-NCR region. Through the paper,

they put forward four addresses - one in Faridabad, one near Okhla Industrial Area in New Delhi, and two near industrial hubs in Gurgaon - as weekly “*baithaks*,” translated as “gatherings,” for workers to visit and share their experiences. These were also intended as local self-organisation attempts for there to emerge critical working class groupings to permeate in the area and expand the focus on intensified self-activity.

Sher Singh ji understood well that his role was solely that of an investigator, of and from the workers' side. He maintained a healthy distance from the misconception that he saw himself as a revolutionary. Several times, he was obstructed by the police, musclemen, or even managers themselves. His response in such situations was straightforward—if workers couldn't be met here, they would find a place where meeting would be easier, without interference, where there would be no restrictions. He calmly accepted that the issue was not about his personal rights but about facilitating communication with workers, and that aligning one's personal struggle with the

workers' cause in the face of state brutality is not as simple as many leftist activists assume.

During this period, Sher Singh ji also maintained close connections with many people—from universities, other cities, his village, and even other countries. Initially opposed to smartphones, he later realized that they had become a crucial means of reaching people. With the help of some comrades in Delhi, two in Gurgaon, and two in Noida, the newspaper's distribution reached around 18,000 copies per month by 2018. His oldest comrades in Faridabad remained steadfastly by his side, distributing the newspaper regularly. After 2018, Sher Singh allowed workers to take bundles directly, increasing distribution to 30,000 copies per month, reaching places where he or his comrades couldn't go. Every month, 500-1,000 copies were sent by post, and after distributing copies by hand, sharing the newspaper over WhatsApp with tea and conversation became a form of entertainment for him.

During the 2020 lockdown, the monthly series of the newspaper was halted. However, Sher Singh ji compiled articles from earlier issues into booklets and, in 2022, began traveling across the country. As he traveled through various cities and villages, he continued the conversation. He often said that “every person is an epic,” and we pause this narrative here, acknowledging that this article may have fallen short of capturing his life of epic proportions. Therefore, we request our readers—if you would like to share your thoughts about Sher Singh ji, *Majdoor Samachar*, or “*kamunist kranti*,” please send them to **kaamsechhutti@gmail.com**. How you met, in what context, your impressions of him or his of you, whether these changed, mutual critiques, etc.—send us these stories. Perhaps the epic that emerges from this multitude of voices will be the most fitting tribute to his memory.

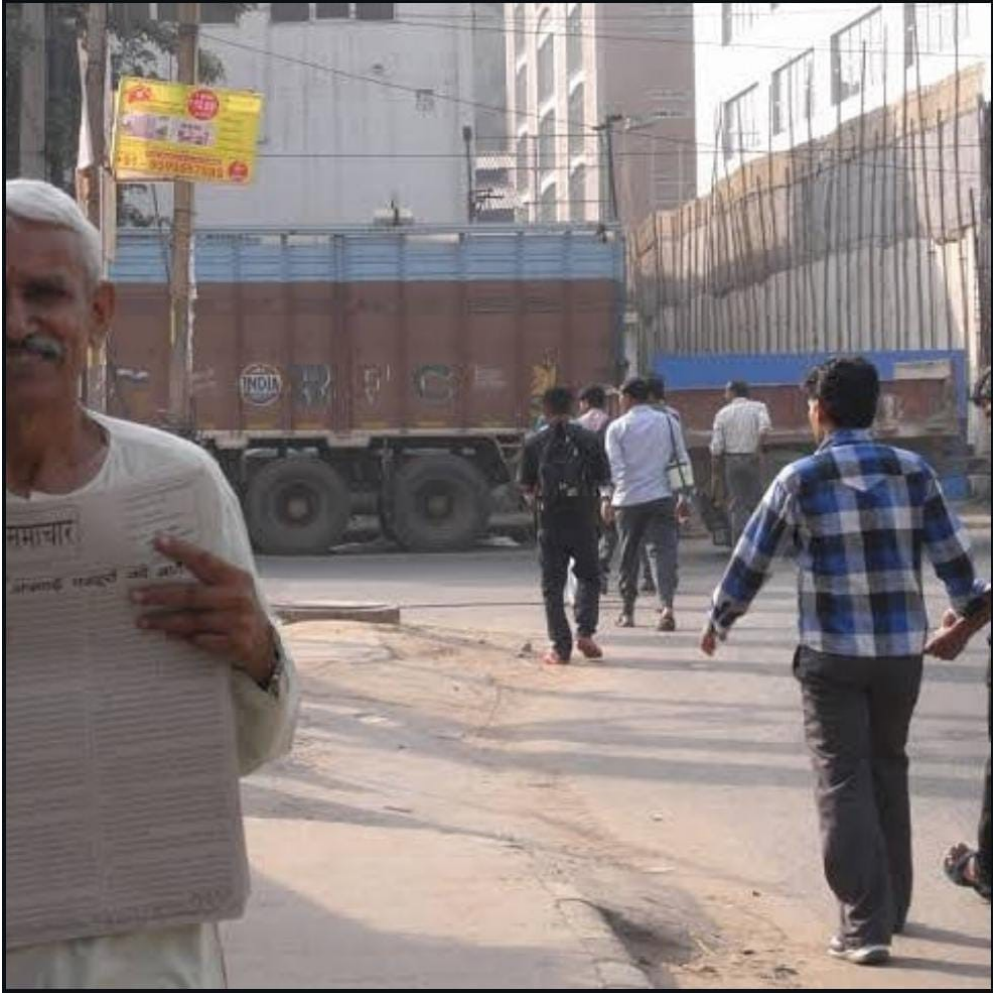


*Distribution in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon*



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*The 21<sup>st</sup> Century....*

# Further Reading

Friends have gathered material pertaining to FMS – back issues, longer write-ups, WhatsApp forwards and collections – on the following websites.

[https://  
faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/](https://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/)

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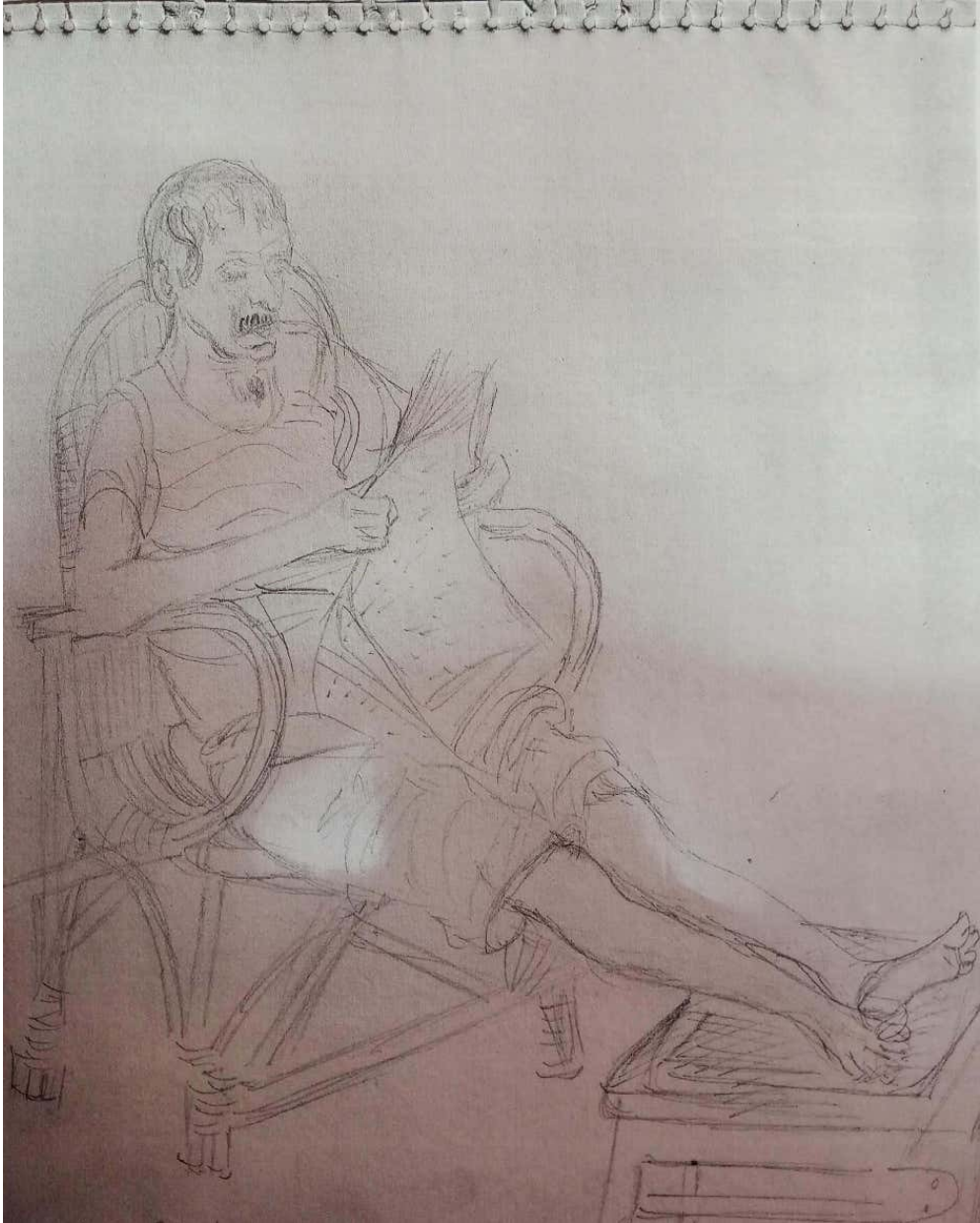
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<https://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/2020/04/self-activity-of-wage-workers-towards.html>

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*Jeevan ka Ullas (The Mirthful Life) : A Sketch by a Friend*