

# STRIKING WOMEN

Jayaben Desai: 1933 - 2010

JAYABEN DESAI WAS BORN IN 1933 IN DHARMAJ, A VILLAGE IN GUJARAT, INDIA, TO A LANDOWNING FAMILY. SHE WAS ALLOWED TO DO THINGS THAT GIRLS WERE NOT EXPECTED TO DO IN THOSE DAYS - LIKE PLAYING ON THE STREETS AND FLYING KITES WITH HER TWO BROTHERS.



AS A TEENAGER, SHE TOOK PART IN THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE BRITISH RULE, GOING ON DEMONSTRATIONS IN HER VILLAGE WHEN SHE WAS A STUDENT.



WHEN SHE WAS 22, JAYABEN GOT MARRIED TO SURYAKANT DESAI, WHO MANAGED A FACTORY IN DAR-ES-SALAAM, TANZANIA. AFTER THE WEDDING, JAYABEN STAYED ON IN INDIA TO COMPLETE HER TAILORING COURSE, WHICH IS WHEN HER FIRST CHILD WAS BORN.



SHE JOINED SURYAKANT IN TANZANIA WHEN THEIR SON WAS NEARLY TWO. AFTER THE BIRTH OF THEIR SECOND SON, JAYABEN RAN HOME-BASED SEWING CLASSES FOR A FEW YEARS.



AFTER INDEPENDENCE, MANY EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES ADOPTED POLICIES TO PROMOTE THE AFRICAN POPULATION. TOGETHER WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHER ASIAN FAMILIES IN UGANDA, KENYA AND TANZANIA, THE DESAI FAMILY LEFT. THEY CAME TO INDIA IN 1964. BUT THIS WAS NOT THEIR FINAL DESTINATION.

AFTER THE 1968 COMMONWEALTH IMMIGRANTS ACT IS PASSED, PEOPLE LIKE US WHO HOLD BRITISH PASSPORTS WILL HAVE TO GET A VISA TO ENTER BRITAIN.

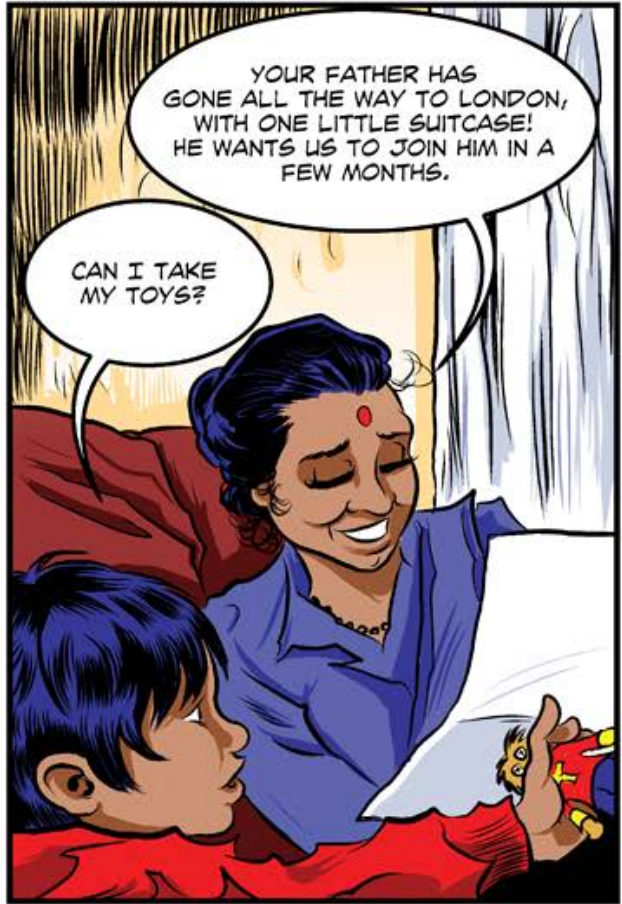
YOU MUST ACT NOW BEFORE THEY CHANGE THE LAW!

LET ME GO TO BOMBAY AND SEE WHAT I CAN DO.



YOUR FATHER HAS GONE ALL THE WAY TO LONDON, WITH ONE LITTLE SUITCASE! HE WANTS US TO JOIN HIM IN A FEW MONTHS.

CAN I TAKE MY TOYS?



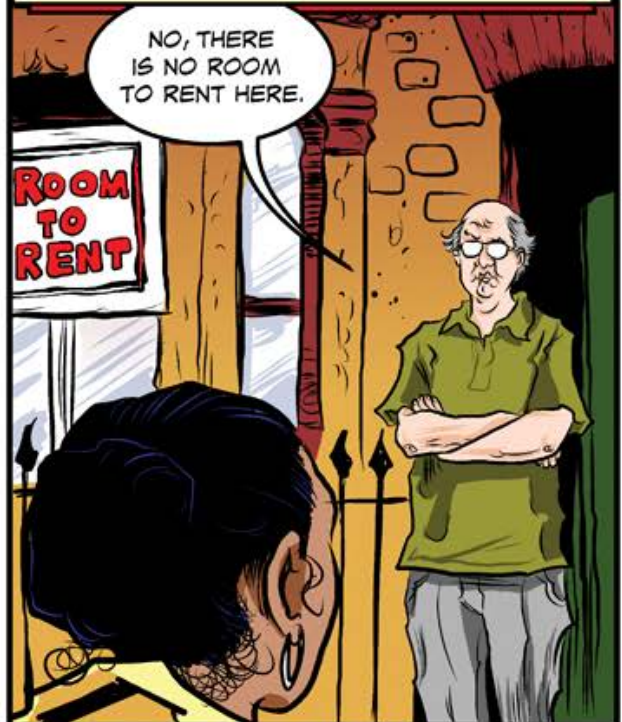
JAYABEN AND THEIR CHILDREN JOINED SURYAKANT IN LONDON IN OCTOBER 1968.

IT GETS DARK SO EARLY, ALL THE HOUSES LOOK THE SAME, AND THE TREES - THEY LOOK BURNT, DARK AND BARE. I HAD HEARD THAT LONDON WAS THIS GRAND PLACE. IT IS JUST NOT WHAT I HAD IMAGINED!



THERE WAS A LOT OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE UK IN THE 1960S AND 70S AND IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR MIGRANTS TO GET HOUSING.

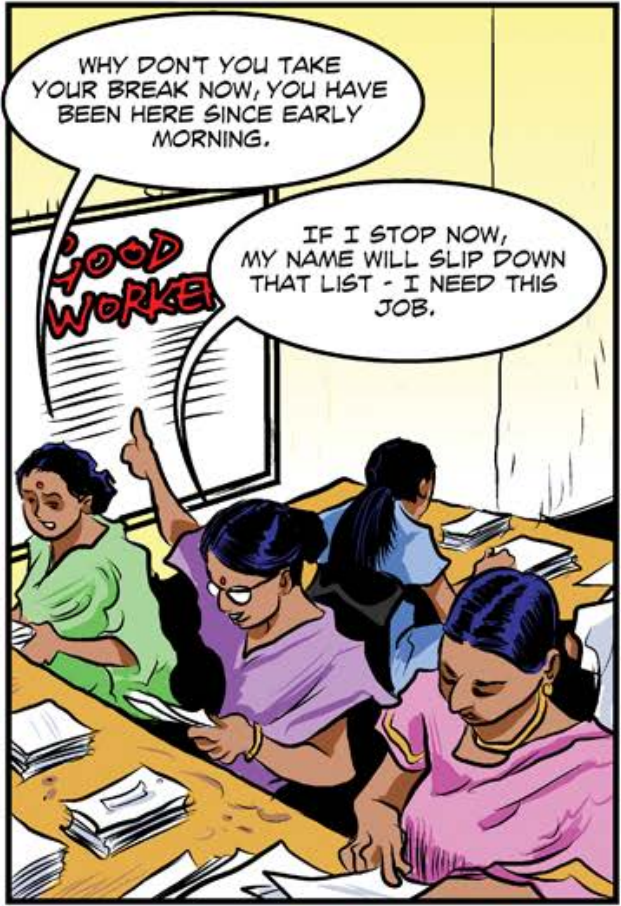
NO, THERE IS NO ROOM TO RENT HERE.





JAYABEN WHY DON'T YOU COME TO GRUNWICK, WHERE I WORK? THEY GIVE JOBS TO PEOPLE LIKE US THERE.

JAYABEN STARTED WORK AT GRUNWICK FILM PROCESSING LABORATORY IN WILLESDEN, NORTH LONDON IN 1974.



WHY DON'T YOU TAKE YOUR BREAK NOW, YOU HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE EARLY MORNING.

IF I STOP NOW, MY NAME WILL SLIP DOWN THAT LIST - I NEED THIS JOB.

THE MANAGERS MADE STRICT RULES AND DID NOT TREAT THE WOMEN WORKERS WITH RESPECT.

I FEEL ASHAMED TO ASK TO GO TO THE TOILET.

WHY DO YOU FEEL ASHAMED, WHEN HE HAS NO SHAME MAKING YOU ASK LOUDLY, WHY SHOULD YOU FEEL ASHAMED?



STOP CHATTERING LIKE MONKEYS - THIS IS NOT A ZOO! AND MRS DESAI, I WANT YOU TO WORK OVERTIME TODAY!

WHAT YOU ARE RUNNING HERE IS NOT A FACTORY, IT IS A ZOO! IN A ZOO, THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF ANIMALS.

SOME ARE MONKEYS WHO DANCE TO YOUR TUNE, OTHERS ARE LIONS WHO CAN BITE YOUR HEAD OFF. WE ARE THOSE LIONS, MR MANAGER. I HAVE HAD ENOUGH!

JAYABEN AND A GROUP OF WORKERS WALKED OUT IN PROTEST ON 20 AUGUST 1976 AND JOINED A TRADE UNION, APEX.



JAYABEN TRAVELLED ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO WIN SUPPORT FROM WORKERS AND THEIR UNIONS.



WHERE IS SARLABEN TODAY? SHE IS USUALLY THE FIRST TO COME HERE EVERY MORNING.

HER PARENTS STOPPED HER FROM COMING - THEY THINK THAT STANDING HERE ALL DAY AND SHOUTING SLOGANS LIKE THIS WILL BRING SHAME ON THE FAMILY.



AS SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKERS GREW, THERE WERE MASS PICKETS WHICH BROUGHT THOUSANDS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE AND WORKERS FROM OTHER PLACES TO THE NARROW STREETS OUTSIDE GRUNWICK. THE POLICE WERE ALSO OUT IN FORCE AND WERE QUITE AGGRESSIVE TO THE STRIKERS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS.





HAVE YOU HEARD WHAT THE SCARMAN REPORT RECOMMENDS? THEY SAY THAT THE COMPANY SHOULD GIVE US OUR JOBS BACK!

BUT THE GRUNWICK BOSS REFUSES TO DO SO. LET'S TAKE TO THE STREETS AGAIN!

BUT IN THE AUTUMN OF 1977 THE UNION WITHDREW THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE MASS PICKETS.

IN PROTEST, FOUR GRUNWICK STRIKERS STAGED A HUNGER STRIKE OUTSIDE THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS ON 21 NOVEMBER 1977.



WHAT BEGAN AS A FIGHT FOR UNION RECOGNITION HAS ENDED UP WITH US CHALLENGING OUR OWN UNION!

DON'T FORGET, WE WON PEOPLE'S HEARTS. SO MANY ORDINARY MEMBERS OF THE UNIONS CAME TO SUPPORT US, EVEN IF THEIR LEADERS HAVE TURNED THEIR BACK ON US.

BUT THE UNION DID NOT CHANGE ITS DECISION AND THE STRIKE WAS FINALLY CALLED OFF IN JULY 1978. JAYABEN WENT ON TO TEACH AN ASIAN DRESSMAKING COURSE AT HARROW COLLEGE, WEMBLEY.



THE GMB UNION RECOGNISED HER CONTRIBUTION WITH A GOLD BADGE OF HONOUR AT THEIR NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN JUNE 2007. JAYABEN, WHO DIED ON 23 DECEMBER 2010 AGED 77, IS NOW CELEBRATED FOR CHANGING THE TRADE UNIONS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-WHITE AND WOMEN WORKERS.

# STRIKING WOMEN

Jatinder Kaur: 1950 - \*

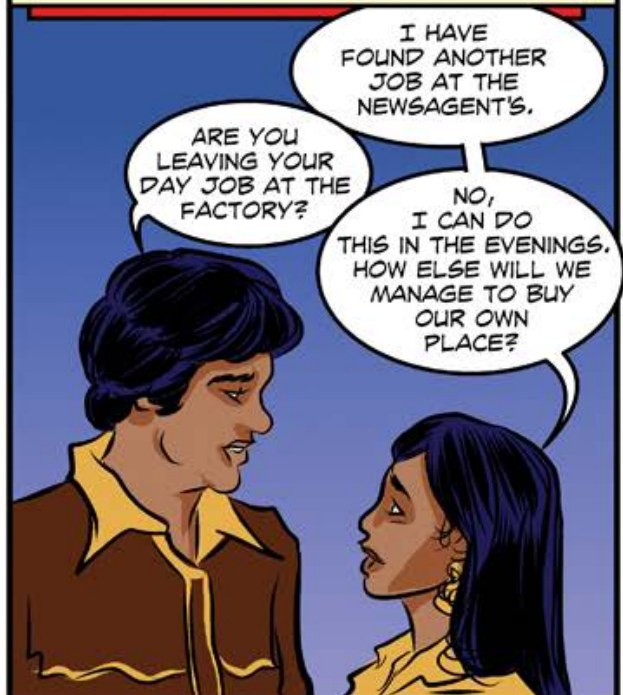
JATINDER'S FATHER WENT TO ENGLAND FROM A VILLAGE IN PUNJAB TO FIND WORK DURING THE 1950S. SHE LOOKED FORWARD TO HIS YEARLY VISITS HOME.

WHEN SHE WAS 15 AND ABOUT TO BEGIN HER FINAL YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL THE FAMILY JOINED HIM IN ENGLAND. SHE WAS EXCITED BUT ALSO SAD AT THE THOUGHT OF LEAVING ALL HER FRIENDS BEHIND.



LIFE IN THE UK WAS VERY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT SHE WAS USED TO. SOON AFTER SHE CAME HERE, JATINDER BEGAN WORKING AT A PETROL STATION.

WHEN SHE WAS 23, SHE GOT MARRIED TO RAJ, WHO WAS ALSO A RECENT MIGRANT FROM PUNJAB. THEY MOVED TO SOUTHWALL, IN WEST LONDON, WHERE THEY RENTED A ROOM IN A HOUSE. RAJ WORKED AT A POST OFFICE, WHILE JATINDER DID ASSEMBLY WORK IN A FACTORY.



A YEAR AFTER HER MARRIAGE, JATINDER FOUND THAT SHE WAS PREGNANT.

I WILL NEED TO TAKE SOME TIME OFF, I AM GOING TO HAVE A BABY.

SURE, BUT DON'T BOTHER TO COME BACK. WE WILL FIND SOMEONE ELSE.

IN THE 1970S, WOMEN HAD FEWER RIGHTS AT WORK AND WOMEN WERE ROUTINELY SACKED FOR BEING PREGNANT. MATERNITY LEAVE WAS FIRST GRANTED IN 1978.

AFTER SHE HAD HER THIRD CHILD, JATINDER WORKED AS A CLEANER, DOING THE NIGHT SHIFT AT THE NEARBY HEATHROW AIRPORT. SHE WAS HAPPY TO WORK WITH OTHER WOMEN, AND MADE MANY FRIENDS.

MY SISTER LOOKS AFTER THE CHILDREN WHILE I CATCH UP ON MY SLEEP, WHAT ABOUT YOU?

I HAVE TO LOOK AFTER THEM DURING THE DAY, BUT I AM HAPPY TO BE OUT OF THE HOUSE EVEN IF THIS MEANS I FEEL TIRED ALL THE TIME.

ONCE THE CHILDREN WERE OLDER, JATINDER ENROLLED AT THE SOUTHBALL COLLEGE TO STUDY FOR AN NVQ IN FOOD AND HYGIENE AND TO IMPROVE HER ENGLISH.

JATINDER SOON FOUND A FULL TIME JOB AT HILLINGDON HOSPITAL, CLEANING AND SERVING MEALS TO THE PATIENTS. SHE JOINED THE TRADE UNION, UNISON.

HELLO, HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, IN 1994, HILLINGDON HOSPITAL CONTRACTED OUT THE CLEANING SERVICES TO A COMPANY CALLED PALL MALL CLEANING.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE NEWS? THE HOSPITAL HAS GIVEN THE CLEANING CONTRACT TO THIS PRIVATE COMPANY.

I WONDER WHAT THIS WILL MEAN FOR US.



IN 1995, PALL MALL CLEANING MADE AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

YOU HAVE 90 DAYS TO SIGN THE NEW TERMS AND CONDITIONS

BUT THIS SAYS WE WILL GET 40 POUNDS LESS EVERY WEEK.



HAVE YOU SIGNED THE AGREEMENT?

NO, IT IS JUST NOT FAIR! HAVE YOU?

NO, BUT URMILA HAS. SHE SAYS WE WILL BE SACKED IF WE DON'T.



ON THE 90TH DAY IT WAS JATINDER'S DAY OFF, BUT SHE WENT TO WORK TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

LET'S SHOW THEM WHAT WE THINK!



THE 90 DAY DEADLINE WAS UPON THEM - BUT OF THE 61 CLEANERS, ONLY 6 HAD SIGNED THE AGREEMENT.

THAT NIGHT, THE COMPANY SENT A LETTER OF DISMISSAL TO ALL THE 55 WORKERS.



THEIR UNION, UNISON INITIALLY SUPPORTED THEM, BUT THE WORKERS REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE AGREEMENT UNISON NEGOTIATED WITH THE COMPANY. THEY TOOK THEIR CASE FOR UNFAIR DISMISSAL TO AN EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL. WITH THE UNION'S SUPPORT THE WOMEN WON THEIR CASE IN OCTOBER 2000.

THE SACKED WORKERS AT HILLINGDON HOSPITAL HAVE WON THEIR CASE AND ARE TO BE AWARDED BACKDATED PAY AND REINSTATED TO THEIR JOBS.

AFTER 5 LONG YEARS, THIS FEELS GOOD!



TODAY, THOUGH PAST THE OFFICIAL RETIREMENT AGE, JATINDER WORKS PART-TIME AND LOOKS AFTER HER GRAND-DAUGHTER WHILE HER DAUGHTER, MEETA, WORKS AT A COMPANY THAT PREPARES MEALS FOR AIRLINES, GATE GOURMET.

MEETA WENT BACK TO WORK WHEN HER DAUGHTER WAS 6 MONTHS OLD. EMPLOYERS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SACK PREGNANT WOMEN LIKE THEY USED TO, WHEN I WAS YOUNG.



MEETA WAS CAUGHT UP IN A SIMILAR SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES WHEN BRITISH AIRWAYS SUBCONTRACTED TO GATE GOURMET.

OH NO! I WONDER WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO OUR JOBS.



GRADUALLY, THE COMPANY STARTED MAKING CHANGES TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR THE WORKERS AND THE MANAGEMENT BECAME INCREASINGLY HARSH. THE WORKERS RESISTED THE CHANGES.

LET'S TRY INCREASING THE SPEED OF THE CONVEYER BELT. WHY DO WE HAVE 3 WOMEN DOING THE JOB, LET'S TRY IT WITH 2 WOMEN INSTEAD.

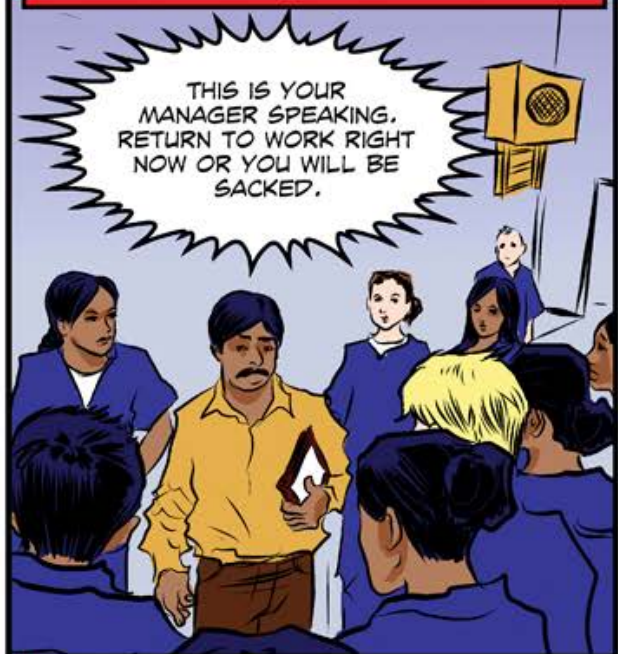
THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE!



ON 10TH AUGUST 2005, WHEN THE WORKERS RETURNED FROM THEIR MORNING TEA BREAK...



THE WORKERS ASSEMBLED IN THE CANTEEN TO DISCUSS WHAT HAD HAPPENED. THEY WERE JOINED THERE BY SHOP STEWARDS FROM THEIR UNION.



BY THE NEXT DAY MORE WORKERS HAD BEEN SACKED BRINGING THE TOTAL TO JUST OVER 700.



144 WORKERS WERE SELECTED FOR REDUNDANCY BECAUSE THEY WERE OLDER OR HAD HEALTH ISSUES. THIS TIME, THE WORKERS ALSO LOST THEIR CASE FOR UNFAIR DISMISSAL AT THE EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL.

