

# THE GLORIOUS TELANGANA PEASANT ARMED STRUGGLE AND ITS VALUABLE EXPERIENCES

– **VISWAM**

The princely state of Hyderabad was ruled by Asaf Jahi Nawab until 1948. The state was administratively divided into Khalsa and Gairkhalsa areas. While Khalsa was under the direct rule of Nawab, the Gairkhalsa area was ruled through Zamindars, Jagirdars and Deshmukhs. It consisted of five Maratha speaking districts, three Kannada speaking districts and eight Telugu speaking districts. The total population was 15 million, out of which the Telugu people were about 10 million.

Telangana was a Telugu- speaking region in the Hyderabad state. It was ruled by a feudal aristocracy. Jagirdar, Deshmukh and tenancy systems, i.e., the feudal exploitation and oppression were in vogue. The people of Telangana lived a life of slavery. 'Huzur, here is your slave; let me touch your feet', are the expressions of the common man while addressing the feudal landlords which reflected their worst and pathetic state and the kind of oppression they experienced. While half of the land in Telangana was owned by the Nizam Nawab, 50 per cent of the remaining half was in the hands of big landlords. Apart from the rich, middle and small peasants, 50 per cent of the total population were landless people. The kind of slavery these people experienced is beyond the reach of the imagination of our generation.

Hyderabad state was composed of three areas, namely, Marathi, Kannada and Telugu-speaking people. These areas were groaning under the iron feet of Nizam's autocracy. Urdu was the official language in all the three areas. Telugu, Kannada and Marathi languages were suppressed. There were no schools to impart education in these languages.

Before 1940, there were no mass organisations in the real sense of the term that stood for the minimum rights. Not even a reformist national movement was there as it existed in the British ruled areas. In 1940, there existed an organisation called "Andhra Mahasabha" with some reformist aims like the development of Telugu language, education and libraries. In course of time, the forces with progressive, national and socialist ideas had emerged in Telangana. The revolutionary forces that emerged from the students have joined them. As a result, the early communist units have come up and started their activities.

Though there was a ban on the party, in the midst of repressive condition, the communists carried on their work through mass organisations. They built up a militant workers movement. They had decided to work among the peasants through Andhra Mahasabha which was already working with many limitations. It was just passing resolutions with

appeal to implement laws and provide opportunities for the development of Telugu language. It was mobilising the progressive forces through its annual conferences. Because of its reformist and rightist orientation, its activities had their own limitations and could not be taken to the vast masses of people.

Communist Party escalated its political activity by gathering students and youth. It admitted activists in the Andhra Mahasabha and worked in a constructive manner. Ever since the communists joined the Andhra Mahasabha and started working, its sphere, depth and seriousness had grown. A serious ideological struggle had taken place in it between reformism and revolutionism; between Gandhism and Marxism-Leninism. By 1944, a firm line of demarcation was drawn between the feudal reactionaries and the progressive peasant revolutionary forces. The people were mobilised into extensive and massive struggles on the problems of bonded labour ("Vetti") and tenancy. These struggles took more militant forms in the course of fighting the oppressive landlords who resorted to attacks on these mobilisations (meetings and processions).

In this course the people brought the question of land before the Sangham and the party. The masses of people were enthusiastic and eager to seize back their lands which were grabbed by the landlords. The people gained such an amount of confidence in their own united and organised strength. At that time the party leadership found itself totally unprepared to meet this situation as the problem came to the fore in such a short time. It could not provide a clear cut programme. Then the Communist party was engaged in developing the political consciousness among the people and preparing them into a united and organised force. It did not ask the people to take up arms. It did not form armed squads. Yet, the people advanced relying themselves on their own anti-feudal political consciousness and organised strength. The peasant's consciousness has reached to the level of seizing the lands under the illegal occupation of landlords. They have become conscious of crossing the legal limits and adopting the revolutionary methods. However, the party was not yet prepared to go a step further, i.e., for a revolutionary action as the course of development demanded.

### ***Mondrai and Palakurthi***

The peasants of Lambada tribe were cultivating the lands of Kataru Ramachandra Rao on lease. The lease deed was expired, but the peasants were not ready to leave the land. They were prepared to protect their right of cultivating their land on lease by resisting the attempts of the landlord. The landlord attacked the peasants with police and goondas. The Lambada peasants resisted the police and goondas with traditional weapons. They chased the goondas by using sticks.

Ilamma's was a small family in Palakurthi. Yet, she was ready to fight to protect her own crop. As the militant voluntary forces were ready to act, the entire people of the village stood by her. The party fought back the landlord goondas with the united organised strength of the people. It chased away the goondas of Visnour Ramachandra Reddy and protected Ilamma's crop. Ilamma fought undauntedly even for a small piece of property. She

enthused all other members of her family. Not only she defended her own right, but also declared, through her struggle, that this alone is the path to be adopted to defend the rights of the entire peasantry in Telangana. With this incident, the police cases and repression were mounted against the peasants. With lathis and one or two fire arms in their hands, the landlord goondas sought to create a reign of terror. The people's volunteer forces repulsed them with, just sticks. Sticks were enough for this phase of struggle. Lord' (dora) Ramachandra Reddy and Janakamma (his mother) vowed to smash the Sangham. They brought the police who arrested and tortured the activists.

The struggle in this period was only of partial (courts, offices) nature. Open and secret revolutionary forms of struggle were being combined. The party cadre relied only on the strength of people's unity and organisation in resisting the attacks from the landlords and their goondas.

### **Post-War Upsurge**

1944 was the year when Fascism was receiving death blows in the hands of the Red Army in the Second World War and the Fascist forces were on the retreat. The defeat of Fascism gave a tremendous impetus to the progressive, peace loving and democratic forces and movements all over the world. There erupted an upsurge in the democratic struggles. The defeat of Fascism and the advance of revolutionary forces in the world gave a great inspiration to our people who were, at the time, going through a worst suffering because of war and famine conditions created by the exploitation of landlords. A mass upsurge had come up all over India. It assumed more intensive form in Telangana.

The peasants in Akunoor (Nalgonda district) and Machireddipally (Gulbarga district in the present Karnataka) refused to give the levy grain (collected by the British govt for the purpose of war). The peasants resisted and taught a lesson to the revenue and police officials who sought to collect the levy forcibly. The people used just sticks and brooms for this purpose. They used more powerful conventional weapons when they found the situation unmanageable. They did not use firearms in the beginning. This struggle was not only directed against the revenue and police machinery but also against the landlords. The landlords were helping the officials in the collection of levy grain. They were seeing to it that the levy was collected from the poor and middle peasants. Not only they were escaping themselves from the levy, but also were filling their treasuries and granaries with money and grain amassed in this course. The party had taken note of the anti-feudal and anti-government nature of these struggles. Nalgonda District Communist committee took lessons from the people's initiative and the acts of resistance of these two villages. It exposed the acts of landlords and the government. Basing on these experiences, the party had given the call for the formation of volunteer squads in every village and to take out protest rallies against repression. It utilised these experiences to organise resistance against the police.

### **July 4<sup>th</sup> 1946: Kadivendi: Martyrdom of Doddi Komaraiah and its Consequences**

The oppressed masses of Telangana were the victims of the worst exploitation in Nizam's feudal system perpetrated by the Jagirdars, Deshmukhs, Patels and Patwaris in the form of exploitation of labour, bonded labour, bribes, gifts and najranas (offerings). Those were the days when all the toiling masses - washer men, barbers, potters, Kurmis, Mala, Madiga, Hindu and Muslim-with no difference whatsoever were getting awakened. This is why the membership of Andhra Mahasabha had gone up to more than one lakh by 1946.

After the people's resistance and militant actions, at Mundrai and Palakurti, the feudal forces represented by Visnoor Ramachandra Reddy, his family and his mother Janakamma had gone mad. They turned into furious dogs. They hatched conspiracies to smash the Sangham. The well organized Sangham in Kadivendi Village (Janagaon taluk) became their target of attack. They asked their goondas to rain stones on the houses of Sangham leaders from their hideouts and to way lay to attack at an opportune moment. Sangham had decided to resist these brutal acts of Deshmukhs. One day no sooner the procession of people with sticks, lathis and slings came close to the "gadi" (fort house) the Deshmukh goondas who were waiting in hideouts started firing at the procession. Doddi Komaraiah who was at the forefront of the procession died on the spot. Doddi Mallaiah, Kondaiah and others were wounded. Yet, the wave of massive people's procession surged forward and surrounded the fort. While defending themselves from the attacks, they attempted to set fire to the fort. Seeing this, the Deshmukh sent messages to neighbouring feudal lords and gathered some more goondas in his support. The Sangham too sent messages to the people in neighbouring taluka (Ramannapet) for support. The people moved in waves with lathis, slings, sickles, axes and all kinds of weapons that they could collect. Kadivendi turned itself into a battle field. Slings and stones confronted the shotguns of landlord goondas. It proved that the people's power is greater than the atomic power. The goonda gangs could not stand in the face of people's resistance. Deshmukh's properties and gardens became the targets of people's fury. The reserved police rushed to the aid of Deshmukh's goondas. They rescued goondas from the people's custody and handed them to the Deshmukhs. They foisted false cases against the people.

This incident was like a thunderbolt. Thousands of people marched in a procession with the dead body of Komaraiah and performed the last rites. They took the pledge to sacrifice their lives for Sangham. They clenched their fists. They roared and thundered like tigers. Komaraiah's martyrdom laid the road for the liberation of Telangana. It had shown the path of revolution. Every drop of blood shed by Komaraiah gave birth to thousands of Komaraiahs.

Komaraiah was a youth of an ordinary peasant family. He was imbibed by the lessons of people's liberation movement in the light of Marxism-Leninism. He determined to destroy the feudal forces. He was filled with the spirit of acquiring land to the tiller. This made him march at the head of the procession. He would have pounced on the goondas like a tiger had the goondas confronted him directly. But the cowards chose to fire at him from a hideout. The exploiters-then as well as now, are just cowards. They always acted like cowards when confronted with the organised strength of people.

This was how the exploiting forces killed Babulal Bishwakarma in Naxalbari (1968), Koranna and Manganna in Srikakulam (in Oct 1967). Whenever the revolutionary masses were in struggle for land, food and liberation, the exploiting classes resorted to the cowardly acts of murder. But these acts only further sharpened the revolutionary people's movement.

The people's resistance of Kadivendi and Komaraiah's martyrdom brought a new turn to the Telangana people's revolutionary movement. "Gutupala" (stick-holding) Sanghams were organised in every village. Women and children were organised. Everyone was taught in the methods of resistance. Telangana people roared like wounded tigers. They raised high the banner of revolution. They gave shape to agrarian revolutionary movement. The peasants came forward to seize and distribute the lands in the possession of landlords. There was a big wave in Janagaon and Suryapet taluks. They revolted against feudalism. The Communist party leader Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao played a prominent role in bringing this turn to the struggle. Arutla Ramachandra Reddy, Bheemireddi Narsimha Reddy and others played an important role. Gram panchayats were organised under the leadership of the party. These panchayats led by the poor handled all problems - from land distribution to various problems in the villages. The authority of landlords was just pushed aside.

This resistance movement spread to 120 villages in 5 talukas. The exploiting classes brought the military into the scene. Repression was intensified. 20 youth, including one woman were killed. The resistance movement was temporarily suppressed. This was the course of development between June and the end of December, 1946.

The Nizam, who was ruling Hyderabad state under the British imperialists as their puppet, declared their "independence" in June 1947. The State Congress and other democratic forces who were, till then, working with the slogan of "responsible government" were angry with this. They were against Nizam being independent and wanted it to be a part of Indian Union. The political forces in the State saw the act of Nizam only as a conspiracy hatched in collusion with the British imperialists. The Mountbatten Award divided the country into three parts; namely 1) India 2) Pakistan and 3) Princely states. The princely states can either join India or Pakistan or remain independent.

Nizam was the first to utilise the opportunity provided by the British imperialists. He proclaimed his independence just two months before the transfer of power to the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie. Nizam stood unyielding even in the talks between the union government headed by Nehru and the Nizam.

With this, the Hyderabad State Congress gave a call for Satyagraha. It called upon the people to raise the national flag banned by the Nizam in all places as a form of struggle. Accordingly, the congressmen implemented the programme of flag hoisting and Satyagraha.

The Communist Party called upon the State Congress to join the united struggle against Nizam. But the State Congress rejected this call. Even then, the Communist party, Andhra Mahasabha, All Hyderabad Trade Union Congress and All Hyderabad Students Union took up the programme of hoisting the National Flag. It spread like a movement from street to street. It took the form of cutting down the palm trees, which were seen as the property of the government, and the struggle to oppose the levy imposed by the government. Workers, peasants, students and women took part in this struggle. Overcoming and with standing religious fanaticism incited by the Mazlis, a good number of Muslims too joined in this struggle.

### ***Nizam - Nehru Bhai, Bhai***

When the people of Hyderabad were engaged in a life and death struggle to end the Nizam's rule, the Central Congress leadership entered into a deal of compromise with Nizam. Nehru government appealed Nizam to join the Indian Union while retaining for himself all other powers except defence, foreign affairs and communications. Nizam did not agree at all to this. Nehru government had itself comedown. It signed a Stand-still Agreement with Nizam in November 1947. Under this, the Indian government promised not to interfere in any internal affairs of Hyderabad State. In a way, it amounted to say that the people's movement is to be suppressed. It amounted to give freedom to Nizam to drown the people in blood. In return to this, Nizam was required not to set up his embassies in other countries. At the same time, he can set up 'Agent General' offices in other countries. It was almost equal to setting up the embassies in other countries. This Stand-still Agreement gave a respite for Nizam. It gave time to him to carry out his designs. It gave opportunity to him to modernise his armies, accumulate weapons and train up Razakars.

The Nizam sought to brutally suppress the people's struggle that was going on at that time against his rule. Gunning down the people, looting and destroying their properties and indulging in sexual attacks against women, he trampled the civil and democratic rights of people. The movement could not withstand Nizam's autocracy.

### ***Armed Struggle-Agrarian Revolution - Communist Party***

The Communist party decided to arm the people when the people's movement was getting dispersed under the weight of heavy repression. At this time, the State Congress too decided to take up arms. The Communists as well as the Congressmen carried on armed actions. The Communist Party had correctly assessed the struggle consciousness of the people. The Communist Party had called upon the people to resist the brutalities of Nizam's armed forces and Razakar goondas (Razakar: A Parsi word for "Volunteer"), and to get prepared to end the Nizam's rule and to carry on the armed resistance in defence of people's lives, properties and self-respect of women. However, these armed actions too could not withstand in the face of Nizam's armed onslaught.

In this context, the Communist Party realised that the Anti-Nizam Movement cannot sustain without providing a more serious programme to the people. It formulated a programme for this purpose. It was the land question and the programme of agrarian revolution.

In reality the land distribution had begun right in 1946. Some victories were being won against the other forms of feudal exploitation and oppression and those victories were being defended. The party organised the people's volunteer forces. The peasants seized back the lands under the illegal occupation of landlords and distributed them among themselves. The people's resistance had reached a level. The land distribution movement also that continued for 4 to 5 months was temporarily suppressed.

In this second stage, the Nizam's armed forces could suppress the people's resistance movement only as the anti-Nizam peoples' upsurge confined itself to militant agitations and struggles.

Similarly, it was also proved that the movement cannot advance and withstand enemy's onslaught if it confines itself to armed resistance only as the State Congress had been doing. Not only this. The State Congress also had the deceptive idea of degrading the peoples upsurge against Nizam to the level of Satyagraha. The State Congress chose to call for armed struggle instead of getting itself isolated from the peoples' upsurge. It thus conspired to defuse and fizzle it out at an opportune moment.

Hence, the Communist Party surged much ahead. It was of the understanding that the armed struggle cannot advance without linking it to the land question. It decided first to seize the lands of pro-Nizam landlords and distribute the same among the landless, poor peasants. In the course of victoriously advancing in this direction, it declared that no landlord should own more than 500 acres and the lands above this ceiling would be distributed. Afterwards it brought down the ceiling to 200 acres.

Though a formal call for armed resistance was given by the three Organisations (Raavi Narayan Reddy, Baddam Yella Reddy, Makhdum Mohiuddeen on behalf of the Communist Party, Andhra Mahasabha and Trade Union respectively) on Sept 11, 1947, the Communist Party was already engaged in reviving and re-organising itself on a sound basis which faced earlier a setback in December 1946. In this course, it has built up youth, women and village committees in a well-knit manner. It took lessons from the temporary defeats. It continues to keep the people's consciousness alive. The Communist party never came under the spell of defeatism. It made efforts to bring qualitatively more positive and firmer turn in the situation.

In its Sept 11, 1947 call for armed struggle, the party put forth the following programme before the people and the cadre:

1. Carry on the armed struggle to overthrow the Nizam government.
2. Organise the classes for the purpose of conducting the armed struggle.

3. Seize arms that are in the possession of landlords and in the enemy's camps by conducting raids on their camps.
4. Paralyse the activities of Nizam govt. Seize the govt records and destroy them.
5. Refuse to give levy and to pay taxes to Nizam govt.
6. See that toddy is not taken out and sold.
7. Treat the landlords who are in collusion with Nizam govt as enemies and seize their movable and immovable properties.
8. Allow the landlords who join in the struggle against Nizam govt to retain 200 acres of dry land and 10 acres of wet land for the purpose of self-cultivation and distribute the remaining land among the poor and agricultural labour.
9. Distribute the government (banzar) and cultivable forest lands.
10. Restore the lands illegally occupied by the landlords and money lenders to their rightful owners.
11. Boycott the government offices, courts, schools and colleges.
12. Refuse to repay the grain and money taken from the landlords and money lenders as debt and interest.
13. Destroy the customs outposts on the borders of Nizam State.
14. Enhance the wages of agricultural labour.
15. Seize the lands under the cultivation of Jagirdars and refuse to pay taxes to them.
16. Defy the government orders, hoist the National Flags and the Flags of Communist Party in every village.

The district Committees of the Communist Party had shown a great initiative in implementing this programme. They had built up village people's committees and the armed guerrilla squads. In the course of these programmes, the Andhra Mahasabha expanded its activities to new areas. It spread its influence among various classes and sections of people.

### **Guerrilla Squads**

Permanent guerrilla squads were organised by acquiring modern weapons. Their programmes were co-ordinated with the local squads.

Four thousand members were drawn into these armed squads. Youth were entrusted with the tasks of village defence. The squads that destroy the road ways and the squads that gather enemy's information were formed. Youth -women and men-who work with enough dynamism were drawn into the couriering system. To start with, one guerrilla squad for each district was formed. As the strength of weapons had grown, the number of guerrilla squads



was increased. Powerful, heroic armed resistance commenced. Razakars who raided the villages for looting were repulsed in a military manner. The machinery that was looting the grain in the name of taxes was forced to flee. Customs outposts were destroyed. The movements of enemy's armed forces were obstructed by destroying the transport system. The role played by the people in these programmes was unprecedented. The people were protecting the guerrilla squads as the pupil of their eyes. They were helping in each and every manner. This unflinching support and help from the people provided much favourable conditions for the movements of guerrilla squads. The squads moved like fish in water.

The people were suitably punishing the landlords and their agents who were extending co-operation to Nizam's forces. There are occasions when they were tried in people's courts and awarded with the death sentence. With this, the landlords fled away to towns from villages. The people's raj came into vogue in such areas. The government seemed to exist only when its armed forces were camping there. The Village People's Committees were all powerful.

### ***Feudal Oppression***

#### ***Came to an End***

Where ever the armed resistance was carried on in an organised manner, the feudal oppression and rule crumbled down. Village Panchayats were formed and their rule had begun in 4,000 villages in Nalgonda, Warangal, Karimnagar, Adilabad and Medak districts. These panchayats had come up even a few miles away to Nizam's Capital, i.e., Hyderabad. The rule of village committees had put the landlords and exploiters under check and these committees stood on the side of common people. These committees were formed with those who took part in the struggle and with the poor and the middle class sections who joined us. The landlords and govt officials fled away to cities. All the village affairs were carried on under the leadership of these village committees. With the distribution of land, abolition of bonded labour, distribution of grain by breaking the granaries of landlords, distribution of cattle and the agricultural implements and the abolition of lending money on interest and with similar activities the agrarian revolutionary programme was translated into practice in the villages.

The illegal affairs of landlords were brought to book. The deeds and promissory notes fabricated by them for the purpose of recklessly looting the peasants were burnt down. The lands of the landlords who took the side of enemy were totally distributed. Ceiling was fixed on the lands of the landlords who adopted a neutral attitude. About 10 lakh acres of land had come into people's hands in this area. Agricultural labourers enhanced their own wages. Toddy tappers were given the palm trees free of cost. In several villages, the people had built up their own irrigation canals from rivers, tanks and bunds etc. They arranged their own hospitals. They freely got the timber needed for agriculture. They recognised the right of women for divorce. Widow marriages and inter-caste marriages had taken place. The consciousness against untouchability had grown. The superstitions and thefts had

come down. The practice of imparting education through night schools was developed. The scientific knowledge and political consciousness had blossomed.

This struggle had its own impact on the Kannada and Marathi speaking areas in the state. The people of these areas too carried on struggle against Nizam. This struggle had much impact on the Andhra area of Madras state. Hundreds of cadres and leaders stood in support of these areas. They provided many things like weapons, money and dens for the struggle. They had built up anti-feudal struggle in the border districts. They organised intellectuals, teachers, employees, workers, students and youth. The writers responded to the struggle. Many artistes gave artistic (cultural) forms to the stories of the movement and had given performances also. In a word, hundreds of people belonging to various classes and sections from this area sacrificed their lives. Thousands of people became victims of many brutalities perpetrated by the British, Nizam and Congress rulers. Be it the British, Nizam or Congress—each of these rulers were proved to be murderers of the worst type.

### ***Let us be Humble and Learn***

The struggle that went on as on Sept 11, 1948 was a glorious one. It had provided us with many valuable experiences. This was the first extensive armed struggle in Indian history under the leadership of the Communist Party. It represented the character of the highest struggle and the strength of sacrifice. It had improved the people's consciousness step by step to a higher level. Common people on their own accord participated in lakhs in this struggle. This peasant armed struggle has raised the prestige of the party all over India and at international level.

This was a heroic peasant armed struggle to put an end to the outdated feudal system. This was a struggle to ensure the right over the land to the landless dalits (agricultural labour), peasants, girijans and women.

This was not just an anti-Nizam struggle. This was an agrarian revolutionary struggle that continued as a struggle to seize lakhs of acres of land from the hands of landlords and as a struggle that challenged the feudal authority and various forms of their oppression, customs and superstitions.

The distribution of land ensured mass base and the character of mass movement for the armed struggle. People getting them armed and organised into guerrilla squads had widened and strengthened the movement. The armed actions initiated by the party could not have continued in the absence of this agrarian revolutionary programme. The youth in thousands would not have joined the guerrilla squads and taken to arms. In no time, the movement would have been crushed and fizzled out.

The Prime Minister Nehru's armed forces of Indian Union that entered the Hyderabad state on the plea of integrating it in the Indian Union and as an action against Nizam attacked the centre of revolution where the agrarian revolution was on the verge of victory. Yet, we could continue the resistance till 1951. It was made possible only because the armed

struggle was linked to land distribution-i.e. the agrarian revolution. It would not have been possible by any other means.

We will continue as real revolutionary forces only when we review the last 5 decades time i.e. from 1969 in the light of these experiences. These experiences of the glorious Telengana peasants' armed struggle are helping us a lot to be away from rightist and left deviation policies. Only when we receive these experiences with revolutionary humbleness we can defeat revisionism, neo revisionism and Indian reactionary forces. This will be a real tribute to the martyrs of Telangana revolutionaries. Then only revolution will be successful.

(The continuation of remaining part will be published in next issue)