

Srikakulam Revolutionary People's Movement - Martyrdom of Koranna and Manganna

OCTOBER 31, 1967 is a memorable day. On this day, the exploiting landlords in the old Srikakulam had resorted to a conspiratorial, cowardly and dastardly attack on the masses of girijan (tribal) people who were getting organised and steeled in the flames of class battles against the oppression and suppression and who rose in revolt. The October 31, 1967 stands as a witness of the sharpening class struggles as a result of organised people's movements by the communist party. The October 31, 1967 is another name for relentless class battles. On this eventful day, the girijans moved enmasse like a stream of ants from all corners of Agency area to attend the Fifth Conference of Girijan Sangham in Mondemkhallu. The overflowing determination of struggle and enthusiasm seen among the masses of girijan people was simply intolerable for the landlords. The landlords were aghast to see the girijans descending from the mountains in row like an army of ants with the girijan women wearing red sarees, well oiled, well combed hair decorated with combs and forest flowers, babies on the shoulders, rice, pulse and vegetable for the Conference and sticks in hands. The landlords hatched a conspiracy. They first attacked the women and then with guns the men who sought to defend themselves. Two activists of the Girijan Sangham - Arika Kumara (Koranna) and Kondagorre Mangla (Manganna) fell victim to the gun shots.

The rage of the girijan masses had touched its peak. The entire Agency area rose like a tidal wave in protest against the landlords. The masses of girijan people stopped all works of the landlords. In some places they destroyed the properties of the landlords. There was a fully legitimate anger. After a month, the government had set up the reserved police camps in the area in the name of containing this anger. The government did not bother to go into the root causes for the girijan agitation and the protest movement. It stood on the side of the landlords and unleashed an undeclared war against the girijan movement in defence of them.

In conspiracy case on DV, TN, CP and 60 others, Com. T. Nagi Reddy in his statement (India Mortgaged) quoted the following from the book, RIGHTS OF MAN, written by Thomas Paine (written in 1792): "That the Government of England is as great if not the greatest perfection of fraud and corruption that ever took place since governments began, is what you cannot be stranger to, unless the constant habit of seeing it has blinded your sense", and questioned: "Do not such objective conditions lead to an explosive situation? If they do who is responsible for it?"

"It is with this general background that one must look at the growing discontent bursting into revolt under continuous provocation and high-handed violent activities of the landlords in connivance and support of the police. Such bursting of discontent, be it in

Naxalbari, Srikakulam, Gopiballabpur, East Godavari, Mushahari, Lakhimpur, Khammam, Warangal—everywhere the same pattern of local people dislodged from lands, illegal exactions of mamools, forced free labour, unimaginable low wages, extremely high interest rates, are fleecing the people to their bones. The communists in all these areas are doing the legitimate duty of organising these girijans to fight for better wages and for land, and to abolish feudal exactions like free labour, low wages, false measures, and mamools. In the process, it is the landlords' violence that they have to encounter first. The support of the police and government is always, and every area, on the side of the landlords. Such has been the story everywhere.

“To take the Srikakulam girijan peasant revolt as an instance for a short review would reveal truly who are the actual conspirators – the revolutionaries who stood by the people or the degenerate landlords and their representatives in the government. The short note mainly in the form of extracts from daily press, which are generally anti-communist, clearly prove that the girijan peasant had no other way except to counter landlord and government counter-revolutionary violence with the revolutionary violence of their own, it will clearly reveal how the landlords were never bothered with the Constitutional rights and privileges of the girijans incorporated in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, since the landlords know that any Constitutional privilege to any section of the people, which goes counter to the interests of the landlords, is a fake. And they proved it in action. The landlords knew that power is held only by those who wield the gun and used it mercilessly. Thereby they taught this historic truth to the innocent girijans.”

Times of India (January 4, 1970), writing a review on the girijan revolt in Srikakulam, pertinently begins: “Rendered desperate by their misery, and the harassment of avaricious plainsman, the girijan of Srikakulam have turned to violence to avenge their wrongs.

“Although the landlords' high-handedness are many, it was an incident on October 31, 1967, that sparked off the revolt..... On that day, a group of slogan-shouting girijans on its way to a Marxist meeting were beaten up by landlords. When the girijans fought back, some landlords brought their guns. Two girijans were shot dead on the spot.”

This was a culmination of the acts of landlords. As early as in 1960–61, the landlords sought to crush the girijan movement and liquidate its leadership. In the same year they made attempts to murder Com. Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatala Kailasam. In 1964, the landlords resorted to acts like assaults on the President of Mondemkhallu Gram Panchayat, Com. Vallabhudu, an activist of Girijan Sangham; the attacks on the leaders and cadres like Com. V. Ramalinga Chary, D. Govind Rao, Venugopal Das and the countless girijan people and the acts like arresting Com. Appala Suri.

The State (police and the Government) did not take any action against the landlords for these dastardly attacks against the girijans, the leaders of Girijan Sangham, the cadre and leaders of the Party. Instead, it unleashed repression against the girijan movement. The brutal repression continued throughout the period. It had thrown thousands of people into prison by foisting false cases against them. It made them to go around the Courts. It had

set up the police outposts in these areas. By the time of sowing and plantation season, it deployed the armed reserved police in the entire area.

Under such landlord highhandedness and police repression, the girijans stood better organised and firmly united under the leadership of Communist Party. These were the days when the Girijan Sangham enjoyed an upper hand in everything. The people had won remarkable victories. The entire period in 1967 was replete with everyday struggles between the landlord classes and the Girijan Sangham. The Oct. 31, 1967 was only a culmination of these battles.

Com. T. Nagi Reddy explained that even under all the provocative acts on the side of the landlords and the government, the girijans got themselves more organised. They extended their Sangham and its sphere of influence. They had won many victories in their struggle for better wages and the land. They had abolished the forced free labour. They annulled the system of mamools to the forest and other officials. They brought down the usurious rates of interests. The methods of loot like robbing the forest produce from the girijans at throw away prices and loot in the name of loans were abolished. The programme of occupation of lands as per the 1917 Regulation was implemented. The sales were allowed only after the needs of people in the girijan areas were met. The dispute among the people were resolved amicably with the help and under the leadership of the Girijan Sangham. As the democratic methods had come into vogue, there blossomed a new political, economic and cultural life in the Agency area.

In his INDIA MORTGAGED, Com. TN has given extracts from the newspapers which focused on the work of the Communist Party in the Agency area.

“Over the past 8 years, the Communists have successfully organised the girijan agricultural workers into a militant enough body to be able to extract a substantial increase in their daily wages, and otherwise demonstrated how systematic and sustained propaganda can transform even the most harmless aboriginals into a dangerously rebellious group.

“No political party apart from the Communists made any effort to redress the girijans grievances against the landlords.”

“In sharp contrast, the Marxists moved into the mountains, lived with the tribals, and identified themselves with their aspirations and hopes. Top Communist leaders toured the area exhorting the girijans to rise against the exploiting landlords” (*Times of India....1968*). From this, one can understand what amount of dedicated work was done by the Communist workers to bring this kind of qualitative changes in the Agency area.

Com. TN has “deplored the promulgation of section 144 and the beating of a large number of people under the ‘direct instigation of the landlords’ and appealed to the Government to withdraw section 144 and stop police repression to create proper conditions for an impartial and truthful enquiry” (*Indian Express August 19, 1967*).

In direct reply to this statement a spokesman of the Srikakulam District Police announced that the "Left Communists are responsible for the present trouble in the Agency area of Parvathipuram taluk" and that they "began inciting the farm labourers to revolt" and that "the wages demanded by the labourers for transplantation were very high" (*Indian Express*, August 20, 1967).

Thus, the police, through this statement, not only became politicians but also proved themselves to be the agents of the landlords. They openly came out against the demand of the girijans for increase in wages and openly supported the landlords who wanted the status quo to be maintained. This statement of the police spokesman talked about "China Party" and of processionists "shouting violent slogans and threatening landlords with violence".

The landlords were flabbergasted to see the organised struggle of the girijans in the sowing and plantation season. The movement had touched even the citadels of the landlords. They actually had gone mad. The landlords in collusion with the police hatched a conspiracy. The landlords of Gummalakshampuram had set fire to their own cattle shed but filed a report of 'Communist arson' in the police station. Direct attacks were unleashed against the girijans. The Section 144 was clamped on 200 villages between July 24 and August 25, 1967. The people were not allowed to step out of their houses. The police parades and marches became a daily occurrence. The police atrocities against the women and the landlords' violence increased phenomenally.

Yet, the masses of girijan people stood firm on their demands. They went ahead with their preparations for the Conference of Girijan Sangham on October 31, 1967. The Agency, rose like a tidal wave. The landlords attacked the women who were coming from Gumma village. On knowing this, the people and the activists of Sangham rushed to the spot to resist the same. However, the landlord goondas shot dead the two activists of Sangham in a stealthy manner.

Following this, the landlords pretended to remain silent for a month in the face of surging people's movement. But they revived their attacks on the girijan masses. The people defended themselves in various forms from these attacks.

Right in 1968, the newspapers came out with their comments on the happenings in Srikakulam.

The special correspondent of *The Hindu* (February 1968) reported that the "tension in the area" which "has been mounting after an incident in the Levidi village.... where two persons were shot dead in October 1967 by the landlords."

"Basically, the present tension springs from the agrarian problem". *The Hindu*, again, reporting in March 1968, said: "The girijan unrest in the Agency villages of Srikakulam district, that came to the surface in July last year, has brought into focus the failure of the Government and voluntary agencies programme dealing with the tribal welfare".

Andhra Patrika (Telugu daily) of March 25, 1968, in a special report on 'Problems of Srikakulam Agency' said: "It is the failure of the government to implement Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation Act, 1959 responsible for the 'present tension in the area'".

- *Link*, March 17, 1968 said: "Exploited for generations, the tribal population of Parvathipuram, in the northern district of Srikakulam bordering Orissa is now feeling the urge to free itself from economic and social exploitation".

- *Times of India*, March 22, 1968, said: "The agrarian discontent which the Left Communists are now charged with fomenting has, therefore, a real base. So far the police has found it easier to side with the plains people in their frequent quarrels".

- *Statesman* on 'Girijan Revolt' published two special articles from a special correspondent, V.M. Nair, on April 11 and 12, 1968, in which it is said: "No political party apart from the Communists made any effort to redress the girijans' grievances against the landlords. On the contrary, they (other political parties) relied and continued to rely heavily on the police to keep the tribals in check".

The landlords and the government could not achieve what they expected from their dastardly attack on October 31, 1967. The people were ready to revolt. The government only sought to further intensify its brutal repression by deploying the additional police force in the area. The democrats in the bourgeois press could not support the policies of the government. They demanded the resolution of peoples' basic problems. They pointed out the causes for the tensions. But the government only paid a deaf ear to them.

The government refused to pay heed to several appeals from the top leaders of CPI(M) like P.Sundraiah, Kolla Venkaiah, Nanduri Prasada Rao, Gunturu Bapanaiah and the Marxist leaders in the AP state assembly T. Nagi Reddy and Narra Raghava Reddy. On March 4th, 1968, Com. TN (in an interview to the *Deccan Chronicle*) warned the government "that the feudal elements were raising their heads again in the villages and had indulged in atrocities" and "if this was allowed to continue, dangerous consequences would follow". In the first week of March 1968, the police shot dead two girijans. Com. TN reported in the AP State Assembly that no less than 3500 girijans were arrested on various false charges and demanded for "an enquiry into the unrest and the series of incidents that were taking place in that area".

The demand, supported by the opposition parties, was rejected by the Chief Minister on the plea that "it was not the time now for a Committee and that the problem in Parvathipuram tribal Agency was primarily a law and order problem".

In a review on the Assembly proceedings, the *Deccan Chronicle* (March 12, 1968) had written that "there was perhaps a case for an all-Party probe into the incident Mr. Nagi Reddy referred to. Truth has to be established by an impartial body not merely for the satisfaction of the Marxist leaders, but also for all those interested in the rule of law".

The *Times of India* on March 22, 1968, reporting on the proceedings of this Assembly, remarked that “the Chief Minister has persistently turned down an opposition demand for a judicial enquiry into a series of incidents in Srikakulam” and “angrily the Chief Minister told him (meaning Nagi Reddy) that any further deaths in Parvathipuram tribal area due to the police firing or skirmishes would be the responsibility of the Communist Marxists”.

Com. Nagi Reddy further said: “It was the government, and the landlords that had consciously conspired against the people to suppress their organised fight for their demands. It was the government and the landlords who used all the illegal methods against the people. It was the landlords and their gangsters that created terror in the villages. It was the landlords that used lethal weapons including guns for the first time against the people. It was the police who opened fire on the girijans. It was the landlords and the government that openly declared war on the peasants.”

The history before and after October 31, 1967 was a history of class struggle between the two enemy camps, i.e., the masses of girijan people in Srikakulam on one side and the landlords, money lenders, the government and its machinery on the other side.

Koranna and Manganna are great martyrs. They are the heroes who defied the exploiting classes and sacrificed their lives in the struggle for the rights of the people. Their two names now lay beside Doddi Komaraiah- the first martyr of Telangana struggle.

The struggle as on June 1968 was led by the Communist Revolutionaries in the Marxist Party. Afterwards, it took a different form. The questions such as why this struggle was not continued in a correct form instead of another form? How the state machinery should have been resisted? How their conspiracies should have been foiled? had been raised and are still being discussed in the last 40 years. The revolutionary organisations have commonness only on one point. Perhaps, no one will disagree with what Com. TN has said in the conclusion:

“I would like to ask who were the conspirators? Was it the people who fought bravely against illegal, immoral desperados of the despicable landlords and their servile government? Or was it the government and the landlords who for the past so many years acted against the so-called canons of the Constitution, not only robbed them of their land and labour, but visited them like plague with all the Nazi brutality, with illegal arrests, tortures and finally started the shooting game to destroy their will to fight?

“For the present, there is jubilation heard from all the bourgeois parties and their servitors over the temporary setback to the great resistance put by the girijans. Forcible repression might have temporarily succeeded.

“I can do no better than quote Marx and Engels, where they said:

“If, then, we have been beaten, we have nothing else to do but to begin again from the beginning. And, fortunately, the probably very short interval, of rest, which allowed us between the close of the first and of the beginning of the second of the moment, gives us

time for a very necessary piece of work, the study of the causes that necessitated both the late outbreak and its defeat, causes that are not to be sought for in the accidental efforts, talents, faults, errors or treacheries of some of the leaders, but in the general social state and conditions of existence of each of the convulsed nations. When you enquire into the causes of the counter revolutionary successes, there you are met on every hand with the ready answer that it was Mr. This or That citizen who 'betrayed' the people. Which reply may be true or not, according to circumstances, but under no circumstances does it explain anything, not even show how it came to pass that the 'people' allowed themselves to be thus betrayed. And what a poor chance stands a political party whose entire shock-in trade consists in a knowledge of the solitary fact that citizen so and so is not to be trusted". (Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution)

After quoting the above, Com. TN concluded:

"Therefore, temporary setbacks should be used by the revolutionaries to study deeply every aspect of the movement and come to certain broad conclusions, to gain valuable experiences to broaden and intensify the struggle. Let the counter revolutionaries and the ruling class shout temporary jubilation from every available house- top! But the revolutionaries know it to be only short lived. He who laughs last laughs best."

II

The Srikakulam Tribal Peasant Movement has brought many things to the fore. The history of the movement unfolds in the backdrop of 1960s and 70s, when the country's political, economic situation and global situation were complex. The pervasive crisis of the then capitalist system affected all sectors of our country. The devaluation of rupee in 1966 was due to economic recession - Food shortages, rising prices of all essential commodities, unemployment of rural agricultural labourers and the educated, the problem of job security and the quest for small piece of land in rural areas. It was the time when the rights of the people of tribal areas were neglected and have left the country and the then Andhra Pradesh, which is a part of the country in a state of distress. It was a time when US imperialism acted as the world's master, the imperialist camp's ringleader and the world police. It was a time of attempts to conquer and subjugate the colonial and vassal countries. It was a time when US started to enter and dominate the Indian economic, political, educational and cultural arena. It was a time when all forms of neo-colonial exploitation were being implemented and the Indian ruling classes were embracing imperialism. It was a time when the policies of the imperialists were further imposed on the country.

There was opposition and resistance to this imperialist hegemony. People of colonial and dependent countries around the world have risen up for national freedom, national liberation, and democracy. In all these struggles the struggle of Vietnamese people has stood out. They defeated the imperialist aggressors. In India too, the people have taken to streets to protest against imperialist exploitation and feudal exploitation. Not only oppressed people, but the soldiers, employees and youth were also protesting and

agitating. It was an intense period of peasants and workers struggles for land and against all forms of feudal exploitation.

Militant Peasants and workers movement were going on in Naxalbari; an organised tribal movement in Srikakulam; murderous attacks of feudal landlords in Nalgonda, Warangal, Khammam districts; atrocities of feudal lords in Rayalaseema; and an intense struggle against the oppression of the rich and feudal classes on the agricultural labourers in Daamaramadugu of Nellore district.

The revolutionary communist committee in Andhra Pradesh had to take up the responsibility for the mass movements going on in various districts of Andhra Pradesh. In Srikakulam, the attacks of the landlords were challenged with an organised force. In Nalgonda, Warangal, Khammam and Rayalaseema, measures were taken to turn the struggles into well organised and systematic movements.

However, in Srikakulam and Nalgonda, after the State machinery directly unleashed repression, a lack of political and ideological restraint was manifested in the ranks and in some of the leadership of the revolutionary communists. What is the reply to the brutality on the tribals of Srikakulam? How to overcome it? And how to safeguard the achievements was the main problem. At another level, the same problem came forward in the districts of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam. Some leaders and cadre represented the aspirations of the people to fight and uphold the achievements; were eager to find a path. Some retaliatory attacks were carried out against the exploitative class. On the other hand, solidarity movements and programs were carried out to expose the bureaucracy and the State. By the war of words and arguments in the assembly, the atrocities and the repression carried out in collusion with the feudal forces and the state machinery, were disclosed with intense agony and anger.

The revolutionary communist leadership took the responsibility of leading the mass movements that were already going on after the revolutionary communists split from the CPI(M) by all means; and assumed the responsibility of creating path for the realization of Peoples' Democratic State in India. At the same time, they have the task of unifying the revolutionary communist forces who were split on political and ideological basis from the end of 1967 to the end of 1968. They had the responsibility to take preparatory work for building the revolutionary movement with a comprehensive understanding. Most of the Srikakulam District Committee leadership refused to understand these things properly. They have not adopted the guidance suggested by the leadership of the State Committee (DV, TN) for the protection, extension and development of Srikakulam Tribal Movement. The political and ideological views of the leadership that had provided guidance until then were rejected with the most individualistic emotions. An opposition was developed to an extent that it was impossible to keep trust on the state leadership. Its adverse effects had an impact on the preparatory work going on made to build a revolutionary movement.

However, the Srikakulam district leadership's experiences in building a mass movement till that time made them withstand there atleast for some time. The existing strong mass base,

though in a limited area, served as a shield for them. They dissociated from the state leadership and its policies and adopted the extremist political and ideological viewpoint formulated by Com Charu Mazumdar. It was with this understanding that the decision was taken to start an armed struggle. Within few months they adopted annihilation of class enemy and implemented it seriously.

In the early days, the petty-bourgeois impetus and humanitarian attitude to protect the people from armed violence by the government was an inherent characteristic that continued in the leadership. The same characteristic has taken the form of petty bourgeois revolution. It is this philosophy that made them to adopt the extremist path. The nature of the movement which lasted until the beginning of 1968 changed into annihilation line. Some revolutionaries refer to this transformed Srikakulam movement into annihilation line itself as the movement of Srikakulam. They do not consider the movement until the end of 1967 as a Movement.

The district leadership took the decision to confront the armed State. In line with this decision, cooperation has been sought from various districts. They were able to mobilise leaders, cadre, finances, solidarity from different districts. In other districts, tactics of distracting the enemy forces were initiated through armed attacks. The base area concept and agrarian revolution programme was given up. They fell pray to the idea of anarchic action concept and seriously implemented it. West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Nellore and in other districts, groups of individuals were formed and attacks were carried out on selected individuals and houses. All these actions are against mass revolutionary movement. However, the leadership of Srikakulam district along with the intellectual comrades of other districts who joined them, students, youth, workers, activists and enthusiasts together shouldered the responsibility of carrying out the armed struggle. They gave up their everything they valued and have implemented the policies they adopted in a manner that was acceptable to them.

Irrespective of the mistakes of these comrades, irrespective of their gains and losses, we appreciate their self-sacrificing and selfless efforts.

Ultra Left sectarianism is a wrong trend of the revolutionary communist movement which is a threat to the entire revolutionary movement. However, they lost their lives for their rebellion against the State with their sectarian tendency. Therefore, even if their path was incorrect, their revolutionary aspiration, determination and life of sacrifice are commendable. Hundreds were martyred in the Srikakulam Tribal Peasant Movement. Revolutionary salutes to all beloved comrades, people and activists.