



ROLE OF COMMUNISTS IN THE PEASANT MOVEMENTS OF ANDHRA

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ABSTRACT

Peasant movements have been organised in several parts of our country for the emancipation of rural poor. Andhra is not an exception. The peasant movements took place against the Rajas of Munagala, Challapalli, Nuzivid, Muktyala, Telaprolu and Gampalagudem in Krishna district of Andhra are prominent. The people waged long battles for their just demands under the leadership of communists and Kisansabhas. The significant critical feature that is explored in this work is the nature of Communist cooperation and their role in the peasant movements. This is not a work of any certain movement pertaining to one Zamindari, but an exploration of a series of interlinked campaigns, agitations and movements in the important zamindari estates in Andhra Pradesh.

KEYWORDS : Peasant Movements, Communists, Zamindari System, Zamindari Estates, Anti-Zamindari struggles, Zamin and Ryotwari System

INTRODUCTION

India is significantly an agrarian based country. Absolutely majority of the people depends on agriculture for its livelihood. Agrarian relations played an important crucial role in the social and economic life of the society. Due to long period of colonial rule, these agrarian relations had become antagonistic among the different sections of the society. The advent of Zamindari system by the British rulers, to serve their own interests, created a gulf among the rural masses. The emergence of Zamindari system had led to the cruel exploitation of peasantry and agricultural labourers of rural India in general selected zamindari estates in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh in particular.

Indian independence struggle had reached its heights and simultaneously the movement against the zamindars had also taken its roots under the leadership of Gandhi. This movement has been continued as an integral part of the Indian Independence movement. Gandhi and several other prominent national leaders took part in the movement against the Zamindars.

Zamindari system was an unexpected event which emerged during the Mughal period in between the government and people. This system was introduced by Europeans as per their tradition and customary habit. According to this entire land belong to rulers or administrators. C. Morris who compiled the Godavari district manual mentions that due to Zamindari system people get down to poverty, and population also decreased. Ryots in India from the beginning gave the share part to the indigenous rulers of their crop. British migrants came into India as traders then they became administration and they directly appointed revenue officers and Zamindars to collect the land tax. Zamindars took a part of the taxes as their commission for this duty. Indian peasants have to take the responsibility of expenditure of company's trade and commerce, its administration and wars. According to Bipin Chandra infact British vast empire survived on the sources of taxes paid by the Indian peasants.

Contributions Of Communists In Pre And Post Independence Periods:

In the post-independence period, the peasant movement in Andhra inherited a heavy backlog of problems from the pre-independence period and was confronted by new ones. The division between the Communist led Andhra Provincial Ryotu Sangham (APRS) the N.G. Ranga led Andhra Provincial Kisan Congress (APKC) continued to weaken the movement. The APRS was more active than the APKC but even the former functioned well only in six districts. It was handicapped by high fluctuations of membership, lack of funds, and ideological conflicts among the leadership. The APKC to a

large extent lacked formal organisation and functioned through a chain of conferences. It restricted its attention to the problems of rich and middle peasant sections. With the creation of a separate organisation for agricultural labourers by the Communist Party in 1945, namely the Andhra Provincial Vyavasaya Karmika Sangham (APVKS), the old problem of maintaining ryotu-agricultural worker harmony persisted.

The Communist Party was still committed to the ideal of a united peasant movement for purposes of political strategy whereas its ideology warranted a militant line for the promotion of the interests of poor peasants and agricultural labour. Its policy ultimately cost the party the unflinching support of the lower peasantry. The peasants depended on the government rather than on the peasant organisations for the solutions of their problems in the post-independence period. The government endowed with necessary powers and resources was expected to strive for the fulfilment of their material desires, receiving as it did its authority from their votes. This naturally reduced peasant involvement in the activities sponsored by the peasant organisations in Andhra Pradesh.¹

The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934 framed its agrarian resolutions and demands in clear terms. It appealed the abolition of Zamindari system, identification of occupancy rights of tenants in all the landlord-tenant regions, debt freeze and strong agricultural wages. The Communist Party of India became silent and whose following shrank considerably between 1929 and 1933 on account of mounting constraint, prepared a new policy followed at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (July-August 1935) according to which the Indian Communists had to stop their radical protestations and to organise an anti-imperialist broad-based mass revolt, consisting the working people, peasants and the middle class by association of all leftists factors whether in or outside the congress.²

Thus under new dispensation, called as the United Front strategy, they had working through the reformist leadership of the nationalist movement. Then the Congress became a revolutionary party of the Indians and Congress socialist party a sister Marxist party.³ In response to the Communist party of India conciliatory gestures both the Congress and the CSP, really never left the Congress, and allowed the Communists in 1935. This agreement electrified the already existing condition in which peasants in Zamindari estates are active by different peasant organizations. The Communists after getting access to the party machinery, favoured to work at the base level, thus accelerating the process of improvement of agricultural crises and gathering the peasants. In the 1920's the party's agrarian policy was to

neglect the peasants as a special individual body. But from the early 30's following the pressure from Communists Congress started to look at the peasant question seriously.

The pressure made the Congress Ministry to appoint a Zamindari enquiry committee. The Committee stationed at Rajahmundry from January 7th to 13th, 1938 to obtain witnesses from peasantry. Local leaders, comprising Socialists, Communists and Congressmen campaigned among the peasantry to face the Committee bravely. The Communist controlled weekly Navashakti in its editorial demanded the zamin peasants to arrange zamin peasant week in help of the Committees recommendations.⁴

Socialists and other peasant minded Congress elite came into direct contact with the peasants of Munagala and they also came to learn the situation prevailing there. By this time local Congress associations came under the impact of Communists. The peasant movements should be viewed within this background to understand why the Zamindari movement moved rather towards the militant path. The peasants arranged themselves efficiently. They started volunteer camps and followed matchless technique of land Satyagraha where the peasants, their women folk encouraged by Communists and local Congressmen, resisted removal from their lands by bailiffs of civil courts, Zamindars aided by armed police and goondas, and bravely faced the lathis, bullets and jails in their heroic movement against Zamindari aggression and terrorism.

The Communists, although gained very little common success by peasant revolts in India, by this period they turned their powers towards directing and arranging agrarian unrest at local level. The capacity of Communists to recognize themselves totally with the cultural renaissance in Andhra at that time facilitated the Communists to achieve power over peasant revolt at the far end of the Congress ministry time.⁵ The battle was more witnessed in Andhra districts. Actually by 1939 peasant movement in Andhra gained a stature and stability.⁶ In the beginning of the war, the Government crackdown on Communists was more severe, as they opposed the war efforts of the British tooth and nail claiming it as imperial war. Major aim of their contributions was to avoid the people from giving to war funds, from enlisting in the army, and from serving on war committees which were set up by the government for carrying on pro-war and pro-British propaganda. Their anti war speeches, posters, leaflets and illegal news sheets provoked the government to take serious rules to curb the Communist activities.⁷

Actually the United Front strategy itself was an opportunistic method of the Communists who were banned by the government in early thirties. In order to follow their work they connected with the Congress. The disparities in ideology and personality clashes followed despite the birth of United Front. This was witnessed as both the sections arranged rival political schools during 1937-39. The Communists attitude of splitting up peasantry as rich, middle, poor and agricultural labourers was not to the satisfaction of N.G.Ranga and his followers. According N.G. Ranga this too contributed to the eventual break-down of the United Front in the peasant movement.⁸ The CPI in its October 1939 meeting resolved to capture power and to transform the imperialist war into a war of national liberation. N.G.Ranga sensing the trouble hardened his hold over Andhra Provincial Peasant Association. The Peasant Association became the playing and war front between the rival groups. By this time CPI permeated the CSP and when in 1940 when Communists were expelled from CSP the whole of CSP of Andhra went under CPI. The struggle between the Communists and Rangaites for control for peasant organisations was the last straw.

Thus the field was left wide open for the Communists since

middle of thirties and in the garb of United Front they entered into the peasant mass and with their mass activities particularly in the Congress ministry time and by directly leading anti-zamindari movements in Munagala, Kalipatnam, Challapalli and other estates, they improved close connection with local cadres and increased their strength and that explains why when the CSP removed Communists from its party, entire CSP unit of Andhra became CPI unit in 1940. Following the lift of ban on CPI in June 1942, Communists started a massive membership drive into Peasant organization. In Communist opinion, the Communist cadres arranged many constructive programmes which helped both the peasants and the government.

Special Efforts of Communists:

The Communists led hunger-strikes to the divisional officers in different districts of Andhra for rice. Due to war requirements rice from Krishna district was exported to Bombay four times the normal in 1940 thus leading to enhancement of rates in local markets.⁹ The Communists arranged many meetings throughout the province with anti-zamindari and anti-government slogans by took advantages of this condition. An important factor which was taken into consideration by the Communists in the war time was their 'Grow More Food'. Irrigation was another main problem taken up by the Communist party's peasant cadres during this period. They undertook the repair of the main canal of the Krishna Delta in Krishna district when the contractor surrendered the contract fearing that he could not finish the work in the stipulated time and for the scheduled rates. It gave a call for peasants to come and work on the canal repair and hundreds responded and worked for about a month in hot summer. Communal kitchens were run, and cultural squads entertained them during work and in the nights. The repair work was completed in record time. Many peasants came down to the working spot from different places of Andhra to work. The work was mainly directed by the Communists.¹⁰

A Communist, Mukkamala Nagabhushanam was the President of Krishna District Peasant Association in 1942 started campaign as per the norms and programme of the APPA to bring all waste lands in Zamindari estates under cultivation. It also succeeded in several of its efforts. Communists produced literature and tried to familiarise the soviet and Communist slogans to Andhra political arena. In a scathing attack, Nanduri Prasada Rao published a book entitled, Rangagari Rajakiyaalu (Ranga's Politics) accusing N.G.Ranga of playing opportunistic politics and betraying peasant movement in Andhra.¹¹ However Communists tried their best to remain within the Congress and use, its prestige for promoting their strength. But by November 1945 the Communists were completely excluded from all congress bodies.

Though CPI's intervention acted as catalyst in the movements against zamindars, in the Congress time, the movements are actually not launched against Congress but only against Zamindars. Even in these struggles local Congressmen led and participated on par with the Communists. The Communists during this period were neither recognised by the peasants as a separate group nor did their ideology realise distinctly.

These agitations were generally supported by the Communists were in the fore front of agitations and almost all the government records accused them of inciting peasants to occupy Zamindari lands forcibly. The Communists wanted to bracket the anti-zamindari and the anti-capitalist struggle with the anti-imperialist struggle. Thus the activities of the Communists and its APPA were not to the taste of the Congress government and thus when the Communist influence among the peasant sections generated tensions and conflicts in the estates.

Communists And Land Evictions In Andhra

In the estates of Challapalli, Pamarru, Mirzapuram, Telaprolu, Vuyyur, Pittapuram, Kalavala Palli, Yeragudem, Peddapuram, Potanur etc., such evictions placed on a large scale. In the villages of Gazullanka, Amudalanka, Potarlanka, Kishkindhapalem, Pippalakatta, Nimmagadda, Nadakuduru, Velivolu, Puritigadda, etc the Zamindar of Challapalli began vast scale evictions. Those lands were sold to some rich landlords, or assigned to his relatives on benami pattas.¹² The Government did not respond and take any action and the evictions and clashes continued even in the Krishna district estate areas. In fact, the evictions became more regular and aggressive on the eve of passing the Peasants' Protection Act of 1946 and were not stopped even after issuing of the Act. They systematically instigated to occupy Zamindars and waste lands and to resist eviction and police intervention. In Kanuru and Pendyala villages of West Godavari district, Athukuru of Krishna District and several estates peasants trespassed into Zamindari lands and prevented the purchases of estate lands.¹³

It was also the period when industrial strikes were gradually becoming militant and communists were becoming leading unionists. The Communist propaganda had impacted in a number of cases of mob violence, arson, looting, murder, etc. He further intimated the Assembly that government would soon come out with a bill to replace this ordinance, giving more special powers to the police to deal with public disturbances.

The police swooped on the Communists offices and arrested many Communists across the Presidency with the extensive powers. The first victims from Krishna district are Nanduri Prasada Rao, K.Satyanarayana, P.Sundaram redy, Chandra Rajeswara Rao, Vellanki Visweswararao, Maddukuri Chandrasekhara Rao, Chalasani Vasudevarao, Mukkamala Nagabhusanam, Kadiala Gopalrao, Thammina Potharaju, Kondepudi Lakshminarayana and Thummala Venkayya. Without trial all these were detained. Actually on the occasion of the circulation of the ordinance, the situation in Zamindari estates of Andhra was very hot as the peasants started movements against eviction and for reduction of rent.

Nanduri Prasada Rao, Uppala Ramayya, C.Raghunatham and fifteen others led a delegation to Madras looking Prakasam's help to solve peasant's issues and abolition Zamindari system. Meanwhile Public Safety Ordinance came into force and Nanduri Prasada Rao and many others were arrested. The Zamindar sold lands provoking Peasant Protection Act by taking advantage of this condition. He also started fictions Dairy Company and sold lands which he evicted from peasants to that Company for Rs.5 lakhs and made his relatives and officials as members of that Company. In the course of time, Andhra estates became as a refugee camp for the Communist cadres who were waging heroic movement in adjoining Telangana against the Nizam and his Deshmukhs.

Communists And Their Activities:

Kisan organisations were formed in Andhra by the second decade of the 20th century. Similar organisations were also formed in Muangala Estate and they slowly developed contact with political parties. Three major political parties existed in Krishna district viz., Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India and Justice Party. Justice Party contested against the Congress and got defeated. In the initial stage, Congress and communist parties opposed the Zamindari system later Communist Party alone stood with the peasants and fought for their rights. Communists organised peasants and agricultural labourers against the Zamindars. They have given political education to the rural poor. Night

schools were organised to eradicate illiteracy and create awareness on contemporary politics. Through, cultural programmes, awareness were brought among the toiling masses. Fighting against the zamindars, Communists inspired the people with their selfless and relentless sacrifice. They built a strong base for Communist Party in the Paragana area. They withstood the ban and repression on the Communist Party and with the help of Krishna district committee of CPI they emerged as a strongest force in Paragana area.

In this historic battle against the Raja of Munagala, Communist Party fought bravely and lost many of its cadres. The communists of Munagala shared the joys and sorrows of the people and their selfless sacrifice inspired the people. Due to prolonged struggle against the Raja of Munagala and because of immense sacrifice made by the people, the "vetti" or bondage has been abolished. The tenants retained their rights on their lands. Social oppression and atrocities on people were fought back. Finally, the Zamindari system was abolished. The Rajas of Munagala, Challapalli, Nuzivid, Muktyala, Telaprolu and Gampalagudem were known for their notorious rule and atrocities on the people. The tax collection authority for the sixty villages on the north side of the Krishna was entrusted to the Challapalli Zamindar of Devarakota estate by the Nizam Nawab first and later by the British, four centuries ago. This tax was not in terms of money. This system was called Asra or Amani. The Zamindar used to exploit the peasants in many ways specially in measuring the yield, in pricing the yield, etc. The Challapalli Zamindar with his litigant tactics won the elections. In 1937-38, political schools were run by the prohibited Communist Party leaders; the left minded leaders of the Congress attended the schools at Kothapatnam, Mantenavaripalem at Guntur district.

The Communists fought against the Namu system and made all attempts to liberate the agricultural labour from the clutches of exploitation of landlords. Paddy was collected by the peasants and stored in a place and distributed to the agricultural labourers. The wages and timings for agricultural labourers were fixed by the agricultural labour committees. Thefts, anti social activities, gambling were controlled and anybody made any mistake the agricultural labour committee punished them. Adult education programme was also implemented and by reading newspapers awareness was brought among the rural people.

The two Zamindars of Mirzapuram, Laxminarsapuram from Krishna district collected the two taxes from the two villages on one land by these two Zamindars. Jasti Basava Rao resident of Kesarapalli, Gannavaram talook was one of the prominent Communist leaders. He gathered the peasants of in and around the Kesarapalli then occupied the 'goparajukodu' land which belongs to Mirzapuram zamindar. Due to this act government filed criminal cases against the peasants as Basava Rao A-I criminal. In March, April of 1947 Ramiseti Venugopala Rao, Anantoju Bodhanacharyulu, Cherukuri Jayaramayya, Erneni Raghavayya, Singamsetti Rattayya etc., were cut off the reeds from pond of Utukuru on the order by Communist party. Police arrested 77 members including 20 women and sentenced them into Tiruvuru, Bezavada, Nuzivid and Kaikaluru jails.

The peasants of Mailavaram Zamindari got inspiration by the Telangana movement even in and around the village and began the movement against the local Zamindari. Many of the illiterates and commoners became warriors and went out for movements. They restored the lands which were occupied by zamindars and face their attacks. Many sacrificed lives; their efforts are not in vein. Because of peasant activities, thousands of acres were occupied by people. Anumarlapudi Sitarama Rao from Koduru village played a prominent role in

the peasant movement in the Mailavaram zamindari estate. Talam Nagulu from the same village a common peasant had social awareness and he actively participated in Communist party.

CONCLUSION

The agrarian slogans and demands of the communists included abolition of 'vetti' and eviction of tenants. Reduction in taxes, revenue and rents, confirmation of occupancy (patta) rights of cultivating tenants, and so on, naturally attracted the poor peasants, tenants and labourer to the Andhra. Madras estates abolition and conversion into ryotwari land Act, 1948 passed in the month of November and came into existence from 19th April 1949. Due to this Act Zamindari lands converted into Ryotwari lands. After long time, the peasants had been eagerly waiting for the abolition of Zamindari Act, but it was done by congress government in the year 1949.

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