

**PROBINGS IN
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF
AGRARIAN CLASSES
AND
CONFLICTS**

K. BALAGOPAL



Probings in the Political Economy of Agrarian Classes and Conflicts

(Reprinted from *Economic and Political Weekly*)

By
K Balagopal

Edited by
G Haragopal



PERSPECTIVES
Hyderabad

Second (Online) Edition : June 2020

First Edition print details

Price : Rs 50, First Impression : May, 1988, Publication 1,
No. of Copies G1,000, Cover Design : Shareef, Logo Design :
Gopi, Computer Typesetting : Ram and Prakash
Offset Printing : Gayathri Enterprises, Ramkoti, Hyderabad

Publisher : Perspectives, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad

For Copies :
Hari, 10-3-30/1/A, East Marredpalli
Secunderabad-500 026

Book Links Corporation
Narayanguda, Hyderabad-500 029

South India Publications
C-10/1 Kakatiya Nagar, Hyderabad-500 007

**Let hundred flowers blossom
Let hundred schools of thought contend**

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to *Economic and Political Weekly* for allowing us to publish these articles which originally appeared in their journal.

We also acknowledge with gratitude the help given by Prakash, Ram, Balaramulu, Sudarshan, Shareef, P. Subbaiah, R. Sunitha and many other friends.

Perspectives

Dedicated to the memory of

Gopi Rajanna

Dr A Ramanadham

Japa Lakshma Reddy

**Who laid down their lives in the struggle
that brought us together**

Balagopal

Introduction

These essays of K Balagopal, published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* during the years 1983 to 1987, present very sensitive facets of transformation process in the State of Andhra Pradesh. Balagopal, trained in science, brings in remarkable depth and clarity to his social analysis. The value of these essays primarily lies in his deep concern for the democratic rights of the deprived and oppressed sections of society. In fact, one of the major weaknesses of most analysis of university-based academics is the absence of sensitivity and concern. It is this concern that is the life-blood running through all these penetrating and bold probings. These sensitising presentations need to be appreciated in the larger context of the socio-economic setting of Andhra Pradesh.

Historically, development of modern Andhra in terms of growth started with the advent of major irrigation in Krishna and Godavari areas during the mid-nineteenth century. In the wake of this irrigation development, there was considerable swelling in the number of agricultural labourers. While their numbers expanded, there was no improvement in their living conditions. A comparison of wage rates prior to irrigation development with post-irrigation development indicates an increase in money wage which got neutralised by an increase in the prices of food-grains. G.N. Rao points out that during the years 1850 to 1890 “the agricultural growth and absence of any improvement of the condition of the agricultural labourers had gone hand in hand.”

It is striking to note that after more than a hundred years there was 'Green Revolution' which also raised the levels of production but not the living conditions of the poor. A study of Dasaradha Ramarao points out the alarming trends in the land holding position. The study notes that around 50 percent of the households have operations in land below one acre. Their number has been constantly increasing. The study also maintains that there is a definite trend of increase in the number of agricultural labourers and landlessness over a period of time. In fact, the proportion of agricultural labourers is one of the highest in Andhra Pradesh and is next only to Bihar. Further, it is observed that a comparison of the linear growth rates estimated to the wages and prices indicates that in the pre-Green Revolution period, the rate of growth in wages is relatively higher than the rate of growth in prices. In the Green Revolution period, without exception, in all the districts of Andhra Pradesh the rate of growth in prices is invariably higher than rate of growth in wages. It is further noted, "over the Green Revolution period, in 15 out of 20 districts, real wages have shown a decline. The decline in real wages over this period is between 10 per cent and 25 per cent in East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Nellore, Kurnool and Anantapur districts and as much as 26 per cent to 50 per cent in Srikakulam and Visakapatnam districts". It is further noticed: "in different zones of the State for all the years the minimum wages prescribed are found to be lower than the prevailing market wages in the respective years". A study of G Parthasaradhy and others not only confirms the finding but notes "inspite of spectacular growth in production the real wages of agricultural labourers have not shown any growth". Stubbornness and stagnation marks the wage structure of agrarian Andhra.

In a study on the "levels of living in Andhra Pradesh" done at the Centre for Economic and Social Studies the following are the staggering figures of poverty:

Poverty levels in rural Andhra Pradesh in 1977-78

(Poverty line: Rs 50 per month)

Districts	Percentage of persons below Poverty line	Percentage of households below Poverty line
1	2	3
Srikakulam	71.93	68.76
Visakhapatnam	59.02	53.36
East Godavari	50.19	44.56
West Godavari	42.09	35.08
Krishna	37.11	32.93
Guntur	35.99	31.43
Prakasam	47.96	44.90
Nellore	47.84	33.91
Chittoor	52.04	49.36
Cuddapah	51.30	43.98
Ananlapur	69.57	67.64
Kurnool	66.04	61.89
Mahabubnagar	64.00	60.21
Hyderabad	61.93	57.29
Medak	71.22	67.54
Nizamabad	41.71	41.62
Adilabad	74.60	65.80
Karimnagar	78.61	76.98
Warangal	72.80	69.79
Khammam	37.80	36.96
Nalgonda	29.93	27.38

Poverty levels of Agricultural labourers in 1977-78

(Poverty line: Rs 50 per month)

Districts	Percentage of persons below Poverty line	Percentage of households below Poverty line
1	2	3
Srikakulam	90.63	84.57
Visakhapatnam	73.89	65.73
East Godavari	62.97	54.60
West Godavari	57.97	45.41
Krishna	47.52	40.19
Guntur	55.38	45.28
Prakasam	73.31	68.28
Nellore	61.70	50.00
Chittoor	72.34	65.14
Cuddapah	63.28	53.00
Anantapur	91.64	85.61
Kurnool	85.95	78.98
Mahaboobnagar	71.30	66.67
Hyderabad	86.38	80.56
Medak	88.34	80.77
Nizamabad	64.12	62.67
Adilabad	91.99	83.16
Karimnagar	90.70	87.25
Warangal	95.83	90.43
Khammam	55.85	56.67
Nalgonda	48.90	44.78

The table of poverty levels reveals that in the year 1977-78, the number of persons below the poverty line in the districts of Srikakulam, Medak, Nizamabad, Adilabad, Karimnagar and Warangal was more than 70 percent. The figures point out that in Karimnagar it was as high as 78.6 per cent. The table also indicates that excepting in the districts of Krishna, Guntur, Khammam and Nalgonda, in all the other districts the number of persons below the poverty line was more than 40 per cent.

The table on poverty levels of agricultural labourers presents much more shocking figures. In the districts of Srikakulam, Anantapur, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, the number of agricultural labourers below the poverty line was more than 90 per cent. In Warangal district, it was as high as 95.8 per cent. In the districts of Kurnool, Hyderabad and Medak, it was between 80 to 90 per cent. Except in the districts of West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Nalgonda, in all the other districts this number was more than 50 per cent. It is these facts that provide the background to the movements and struggles in poverty-ridden districts that form the main base of Balagopal's probings.

Another facet of agrarian society of this State is life of the tribals in Agency areas. The plight of tribals has a long history of repression and deprivation ever since the incorporation of these areas under the East India Company rule during the latter half of the 18th century. The main Agency area in Andhra Pradesh extends over 30,000 square miles covering parts of the districts of Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, Khammam, Warangal and Adilabad districts. The core of the Agency area passed into the hands of the East India Company in 1765. In the early stages, the company operated through their agents. In the wake of Rampa outbreak they introduced muttadars for the

collection of revenue from the Agency area. It was during this period that there was a steady influx of plainsmen and the dispossession of tribal land in favour of plainsmen. By the middle of the 19th century, the tribal areas were opened up by motorable roads that brought in their wake the forest contractors, the landlords, the traders and the moneylenders in large numbers. The commercial exploitation of the forests by the government with the help of contractors led to the deprivation of the basic rights of the tribals to the woods and the forest lands enjoyed by them for centuries.

The Madras Forest Act of 1892 formalised the exploitative measures by depriving the tribes of access to the “reserved” and “protected” forests. It made provisions to penalise the tribals for trespassing and grazing of cattle, damaging the trees and quarrying stone or burning lime or charcoal, and virtually prohibiting *podu* cultivation. This could mean a direct threat to the legitimate livelihood activities of the tribals and their way of life.

Added to this was the growing menace of indebtedness which multiplied at an exorbitant rate through the cunning ways of the *shabukars*, often resulting in the transfer of tribal lands to the *shabukars*.

During the early years of India’s independence, the tribal question received some special attention. The Madras Presidency came out with two reports - one on the Socio-Economic conditions of the Aborigines and Tribes of the Province of Madras (Ayyapan Committee-1948) and another on the Special Agency Development (Malayappan-1952). The reports submitted by both these officers highlight the exploitative nature of the production, trade and exchange relations in the Agency area. The Ayyapan Committee recommended that *podu* should not be suddenly stopped but

it may be slowly restricted while the tribesmen are provided with suitable land for permanent cultivation and helped with credit facilities. However, the report had no answers to the questions as to where this alternative was to be found, or how the tribes could break out from the clutches of *shahukars* and traders. It is pointed out that the major problems faced by the tribes was one of expropriation of the agricultural land by the plainsmen, as well as neglect of facilities like maintenance of irrigation works. It is clearly brought out that the interaction between the tribals and the non-tribals had worked against the well-being of the tribes.

An in-depth study of three tribal villages on the basis of land records for a period of eighty years shows that “the State policy of land restoration had not helped the tribals but protected the interests of the rich classes of the non-tribals. Mostly landlord and rich peasant sections belonging generally to non-tribal forward caste communities dominate the social relations in the Scheduled Areas to the disadvantage of small and marginal peasant sections of the tribal and non-tribals communities. Ultimately, the ‘native tribal’ has himself become alien in his original dwelling places. These have far-reaching effects on the tribals and no wonder it has led to ever-increasing restlessness among the tribals”.

During the post-independence period, the State launched certain ‘ameliorative’ measures through public policies to overcome the situation that had been created as a result of entry of the State and plainsmen into the tribal areas. The policies initiated by the State have been examined by several investigators and researchers. Findings of some of these studies highlight the following trends: The studies point out that the main grievance of the tribals has been that they are deprived of their rightful land and property. Owing to centuries of

neglect and exploitation by landed interests and deprivation of forest rights, there has been an explosion of pent up anger and this resulted in *girijan* revolts.

The State intervention presented itself to the tribals in the form of forest rangers and the Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC) officials who are notoriously steeped in corrupt practices. In order to be allowed to cultivate under the '*podu*' system, the forest rangers had to be paid regular bribes in cash kind and labour. There were instances where in return for allowing '*podu*' cultivation, forest officials "extracted forced labour of the tribals for the forest department work involving clearing hill slopes, digging ditches and preparing beds for eucalyptus and teak plantations". Receipts were obtained from the villagers for payments that were never made; the entire amount towards wages was in this way embezzled by the officials. There were reports, too, about the growth of an established practice of regular collections by forest officials of garden and forest produce, firewood, hens, eggs etc. A kind of illegal toll is also charged on sales of articles made out of forest products. The researchers further point out that the Girijan Corporation has not been paying remunerative prices to the tribals for minor forest produce. Due to low prices paid by the Corporation, the minor forest produce has been slipping into the hands of private merchants. The Corporation also failed to supply adequate quantity of domestic goods.

The failure of the GCC and the nationalised Commercial banks is evident from the largescale incidence of tribal indebtedness. A study points out that 61% of the tribal households are debtors and the incidence of debt is very high in the case of landless households. The sources of credit are rich tribals, traders and moneylenders. From the total loans, only one fourth of the amount is advanced by the official and

governmental agencies. The study also points out that 67% of the loans are used for consumption purposes. The loans are taken by mortgaging the land, cattle and men. It is extremely difficult for the tribals to get out of the debt trap. For their wages are so low that they cannot clear off their debts. The studies on the minimum wage policy also suggest that while the laws exist on the statute books, they are not enforced. The low wages account for the poor standards of living, with the tribals being unable to afford even minimum needs like food, health and education.

The measures for health have had no effect on the quality of tribals health. A study of incidence of T.B. indicates that the mortality rate due to this particular disease in the study area has been 12 times more than the all India rate. Another study on health pointed out the high incidence of gastrointestinal infection and also typhoid and malaria. The studies trace the causes for this state of health to deficient diet, poor sanitation, ill-ventilated houses and contaminated drinking water.

The studies on nutrition programmes point out that the food supplied is not nutritious. There are cases of leakages and pilferages. Some studies noted that as many as 68% of the children are found to be suffering from malnutrition as their food lacks caloric content and Vitamin A and B. It is also deficient in sugars, oils, milk, leaf vegetables and pulses. It is noted by a study that although the nutrition programme is intended for the children below the age of six years, most of the children carry the food to their houses and share it with the other members of the family. This conclusively indicates the large-scale poverty and starvation among the tribals.

All these studies on different facets of development and State intervention reveal the painful fact that they have been

only half-hearted measures. The State, given the larger socio-economic structure, seems to be totally lacking in will to better the lot of these deprived groups. All its policies raise the hopes and expectations without any matching performance.

These reports and research studies done by several scholars in different institutes and universities together indicate the problems of poverty and exploitation. The hardest hit sections of this exploitation are the agricultural labourers and the tribals. While these studies help us in understanding the magnitude of the problems and growing crisis, their failure lies in tracing the structural causes and peoples' struggles to change this reality. It is this most important missing link that is provided by these probings.

These probings are presented with a thematic unity. The first part deals with the agrarian relations, struggles and repression in rural and tribal Andhra Pradesh. The second part covers the emergence of 'new classes', and the way they use the State and its coercive power.

These essays bring out varied facets of Andhra society and economy on the one hand and the politics and emerging contradictions on the other. One underlying thread that runs through these essays is that the economic base of Andhra society is under the grip of semi-feudal relations and comprador bureaucrat capital. This is not only evident from the types of social relations but by the methods of appropriation: the non-economic or extra market coercion continues in different forms. These essays, drawing as they do from rich field observation, do pose a question to all the university-based economists and armchair social scientists about the validity of their argument about the dominance of capitalist mode of production and 'rise of capitalist farmer'. The continuation of the semi-feudal modes of behaviour in social practice and

methods of appropriation in the economic sphere in different parts of Andhra Pradesh has to be accounted for. It is these 'empirical insights' that make Balagopal not only raise serious questions on the scholarly analysis of a sociologist of A R Desai's stature, but provide an alternative analytical frame for rural analysis.

Another facet of development is the growth in agricultural sector and expenditure of the State. These two processes gave rise to a type of capital which is not capable of reproducing itself. Capitalism is a process of economic development which releases the productive forces and creates an entrepreneurial class. But the widespread contractor class, wine shops, the real estate business reveal a deeper 'malaise' in the economy. This class of neo-rich, instead of looking and working against feudal modes, developed stakes in them. They strive to promote those practices. The development created 'lumpen' categories that cannot initiate and encourage the western type of 'liberal democratic process'. The social experience and analysis reached a stage where new analytical categories are necessary to explain the concrete reality. The 'lumpen class' as an analytical category with certain minor modifications can be highly helpful in capturing the reality. The lumpenisation process can be understood only in the light of the process of subversion of democratic institutions, authoritarians and anarchic processes they cause on the one hand and the universal misery and pauperisation of the rural people on the other.

From the essays of Balagopal, it can be inferred that the 'lumpen class' constitutes an important part of the social base of political power. Although these essays do not directly advance this thesis, it can be deduced from the data. These essays do point out at a great length and very forcefully how the 'rule of law' - a product of liberal capitalism - is violated

time and again. The brutalisation of police machinery, the management of jails, the callousness of various governmental agencies and so on do suggest not only the type of social relationships but the emerging character of the Indian State. The increasing atrocities on Dalits in the form of Karamchedu episode affirm the lumpen nature of this class. The last straw on the camel's back is put with the judiciary and the universities not being able to maintain and guard their 'autonomy' and pro-peoples' concerns. These two institutions are the finest products of liberalism, while Indian 'capital' opted for them in form, it has not given them as much of the strength and vitality as their 'content' would require. With the result, the democratic forms are found to be getting increasingly feudalised or lumpenised. This in turn results in 'lawlessness' which characterises working of different institutions.

The ruling class which is not rooted totally in productive process finds strange routes to legitimisation of power. The slogans, rhetoric, histrionics and electoral waves characterise the rules of its power game. They articulate the peoples' demands through high-flown public policies without any sincerity and concern. It needs no mention that such policies flounder and fumble. The shallowness of these policies is nowhere as blatant as in the agrarian sector. The way land reform policy is carried out provides conclusive proof of the ineffectiveness of the present system in bringing structural changes in the agrarian society. This dichotomy requires to be understood as a background and the context for various peasant uprisings in different parts of the State. This experience is no different in the case of reservation policy. The two write-ups on reservation policy also reveal the serious crisis building up in the system. This also indicates that the manipulations and manoeuvrability of the ruling groups is getting marginalised.

Another area that engages intense attention of these essays is the tribal question. There are a number of essays that deal with the exploitation of tribals stretching from Adilabad to Srikakulam. The forest bureaucracy, the contractors, the traders, the moneylenders continue to inflict enormous injustice on the tribal groups. These injustices are further enhanced with the entry of the State into the forest for different reasons. The various measures, instead of providing relief, rendered the lives of the tribals not only miserable but also more complicated. They are pushed to a corner thereby giving rise to struggles. The struggles, instead of being addressed at the political or economic levels, as politics and economics are the real causes, are sought to be tackled as problems of law and order. The entry of 'law and order' machinery into the forest triggers altogether a different process. One does not know how any armed force can maintain the order. The experience shows that neither the machinery is able to bring back the order nor maintain the law. On the contrary, the 'lawlessness' they create is beyond one's imagination. It is this point that is very effectively driven home in these essays.

The unfolding nature of the Indian State from the above account is not only very revealing but indicates its other side which is less discussed and least understood. Indian State, Balagopal maintains, has been a very powerful State. He is in agreement with DD Kosambi's formulation that while in Europe the classes created the State, in India, it is almost the State that has created the classes. The powerful character of the Indian State is quite evident and manifests from the ancient times to the modern. From the days of burning of the forest for preparing the land for agricultural use, to burning of human habitations in Chintapalli, the Indian State retains its 'burning' character.

The institutionalised violence and the indiscrete way the State employs violence, whether in lock-up deaths or in ‘encounters’ or in handling a protest or a demonstration, throw light on the darker and brutal side of the Indian State. This aspect is not as much publicised as its other side - soft or developmental. It is the latter, which receives wider publicity in our ‘Free Press’. The other side of the State - its ruthlessness, lawlessness, brutality - do not receive adequate attention either of the Press and much less by social sciences. If these acts receive any attention at all, they are presented more as acts of ‘counter-violence’ and not as acts of violence. It is the ‘other side’ of the State that these essays present. It is only through such essays that one can gain a total understanding of the phenomenon. It is this understanding that helps us in not only appreciating the democratisation process but the need and urgency for it. The form and the content of these essays not only aims at heightening the understanding but also sensitise the democratic opinion.

Balagopal is not only an active intellectual, but is an intellectual activist. In these essays, it is not only the ugly reality that is discussed but the urgency for changing the reality is presented with backing of a sound philosophy and a vision for a better social order based on higher human values. These essays are a result of ‘praxis’. These probings, therefore, not only stand as a testimony to contemporary history or agrarian society but portend the emerging contradictions and call for conscious intervention of the democratic forces in the historical task of creating a better society.

Hyderabad
April 1988

G Haragopal
University of Hyderabad

Foreword

On the methodology of studying society

A few years back an intellectual, who evinces keen interest in the mode of production debate in the columns of *Economic and Political Weekly* read the review article of Balagopal on Barry Pavier's book on Telangana. His instant reaction, as reported to a friend of mine, was that Balagopal does not join the debate at the abstract level but presents his case through the concrete. He lamented further, that this pre-empts a debate without others joining. Except in a few cases like the review of Pavier's book, or the review of AR Desai's edited volume, or the review of Sahasrabudhey's edited volume, Balagopal never became a debating issue in the columns of *EPW*, though all his articles deal with the most sensitive issue of the character of the State power in India and the nature of transition that is taking place in the social relations.

It is this sensitive issue that generated a wild debate on the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture, again in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, where passions ran riot and polemics thrived. In such a debate, the Indian academia presented itself in the best of colours and it must be remembered these are all in the specialised wing of *EPW* called the "Special Articles". The *EPW*, as one notices, has developed an interesting division of labour, and to use a Mao phrase, a division of labour without unity. The division is between the specialists writing and debating in "Special Articles" and another set of correspondents who file reports on the field level data generated by struggles, turbulences and perversities

of Modern India, a section which people read to know about the Indian society in motion. It is this section that records the contemporary history in making, whether it is the drought conditions, the caste wars, the environmental degradation, the various nationalist movements, the religious atrocities, the people's struggles for land, or wages, or forests or the State atrocities. The other section dealing with special articles draws on the academia's research output and it is here that debates get generated. The articles generated their own data may be with use of sampling techniques, structural questionnaires etc. or may be purposive samples and an interview method; whether it is Punjab from where Rudra and colleagues draw the samples or from the developed pockets like the IAAP districts in various States like Utsa Patnaik did, or the intensive studies done on Tanjore district or the Kosi canal area by Pradhan Prasad, the researcher almost went along with the capital and collected data to see whether capital-labour relation is established in the region, within one sphere of the Economy. Thus the search for the categories of capital, like 'free wage labour', 'investment reinvestment of surplus', 'growth of modern capital equipment', in those regions took place. Depending on the academic specialisation of the debater, the database has slightly more statistical inference techniques in some cases, more rigorous definition of capital and sometimes if one is a sociologist some doses of institutions and superstructure. The debates sometimes got tossed between the eastern Indian States supporting semi-feudal hypothesis and the Green Revolution States like Punjab. Sometimes, the debate got tossed between different volumes of Capital (Marx's Capital) and sometimes between different language editions of Capital and sometimes between different collected works of Lenin.

If one looks at the debate as a response to the ongoing crisis in Indian society, the debate sadly is limited to the

contradictions between the ruling classes. To that extent, it ran short of the ruling classes' own estimate of the crisis. The ruling class through its representative, the Congress Party, did not look at the crisis as simply a contradiction between feudalism and the capitalism (imperialism), but as a contradiction between the ruling classes and the broad masses of the ruled. That is the reason why the Congress split itself and presented a symbolic programme of controlling the feudal and comprador interest on the one hand and brought into debate the 'poverty question', particularly the rural poverty. The spate of legislations, abolishing the privy purses, princely privileges, bank nationalisation, control of monopoly and restrictive trade practices and control of the equity participation speak of the symbolic gesture of the State. Parallely, the State has given the touchy slogan "*Garibi Hatao*" and launched a spate of anti-poverty programmes recognising the severity of the contradictions between the ruling classes and the ruled, particularly in the rural areas. The minimum wage legislation, the Bonded Labour Abolition Act, the Food for Work Programme, the Small Farmers Development Agency, the Marginal Farmers Agency and the Tribal Developmental Plans, speak of the perception of the State about its contradictions with the classes, poor peasants and agricultural labour.

The mode of production debate sadly by-passed this aspect of the contradiction in the special articles of *EPW*. However, the correspondents columns of *EPW* take up precisely these aspects i.e. the contradiction between the State and the people and present data from the peoples' side. They give us the struggle aspect of the contradictions and as happens, the peoples' struggles throw up new dimensions of Indian society and new data on the perceptions of the people. If one collates the various reports in *EPW*, one finds an interesting panoramic view of Indian society in motion.

What looks like a free agricultural labour in a structured questionnaire, becomes totally different in the struggle. The extra-economic relations, be it the caste affiliation, be it the landlords monopoly, be it the traders' squeeze, be it the moneylenders' dominance, all of them come into open in a struggle. In the non-struggle period, the oppressed possibly present the best form of defence of the oppressor and give such a data, but during a struggle, the opposite takes place. The data itself gets transmuted. The case of Karamchedu and Neerukonda illustrate the point. In the normal mode of production debate, the districts where these villages are located have a high degree of commercialisation, a large contingent of free wage labour, a large amount of investment, reinvestment of surplus, and a diversion of a portion of the surplus to the cinema industry and to industrial activities, and get discussed as the advanced districts or otherwise presented as districts with dominance of capital. But, once the Malas and Madigas attempt to protect their 'capitalist freedom', the trouble starts with extra economic repression. In the repression and the struggle that ensued, a host of new data on social relations emerge. The data is new not because the condition did not exist earlier, but the conditions come into our consciousness as the opposition to the conditions become predominant. In the numerous reports and fact-finding team reports, we get the picture of social relations as depicted through the eyes of the oppressed and their world-view. A report, which I had an occasion to read recently prepared by the PDSU study team, gives the extra economic dimensions of the villages, otherwise passed off as capitalistic villages. The villages have a few landlords, who are simultaneously cinema kings, political leaders and industrialists too. They practice tenancy and use money lending as a part, they occupy *poramboke* and other lands, and prevent the Mala and Madiga agricultural

labour from cultivating the lands granted by the government. The incidents and the consequent organisational effects like Dalit Mahasabha have thrown up a new set of data, a new set of demands on the society. It will be surprising to note that what people thought to be a backward area - feudal dominated area - problem of land and land redistribution, is very much a serious problem in the developed capitalist belt. This can be seen from the demands of the Dalit Mahasabha. One of their fourteen-point charter is land to the landless, and land centric struggle.

Struggles generate new data and re-evaluate old data. This is because struggle presents an opposition aspect of the contradictions present in society. While contradictions are present in all societies, it is only at the point of struggle, the opposition aspect of the contradiction comes to the fore and subsumes the unity aspect and the struggle points towards resolving the contradictions by the oppressed side's world-view that generates new data and new evaluation of the existing data.

It is in this context that the two areas which form the subject matter of Balagopal's articles throw up new dimensions of society and offer a methodological difference in studying the social relations. The first one refers to the political economy of the areas where peoples' movements take place and the second is in the nature and character of State power vis-a-vis the civil society in the arena of civil liberties. In a sense, the two in combination give the totality of the mode of production or to be exact the nature of transition in the Indian society. The articles on political economy, whether they refer to Telangana or the Telangana districts, or the East Godavari or Vishakhapatnam districts, tell us the world-view of the poor peasants and agricultural labour and the twin contradictions of imperialism and feudalism that oppress them.

In the light of that world-view is presented what otherwise is taken as capital's control over the existing feudal order, what I call if I am permitted to say, the capital's feudalisation process, or to put it more conventionally, capital's comprador character. The feudalisation process is more visible in the arena of civil liberties. Reports of encounter killings, lockup deaths prepared by Balagopal and his friends speak volumes about it. Summary trial and justice are a part of a feudal ruling class order and eliminating the 'evil' is also a part of it. Encounters and lockup deaths are only a grim reminder of a situation where the State and its various organs cannot defend its own constitutional rights, not to speak of general democratic rights of the struggle. The entire corpus of the legal and political scientific theories of State developed on the capitalist principles take a back seat and settle down in the academia, the concrete practice of the State does not crave their indulgence, is the moral of the stories told by Balagopal and his friends. It is this reliance on the concrete that makes for a methodological departure in studying social relations. The concrete cannot be debated, it can only be changed and hence possibly Balagopal does not get debated, while the attempts at the change sometimes draws him into a debate, as happened in the three/four debates mentioned earlier.

It is a truism to state that every question has the answer built in it and that every question represents a particular world-view. If one starts with a search for capitalist farmer, one finds him, but may be in a distorted form. If one remembers that in Reality, the abstracted form used in the theory, always appears in distortion, there is always room for debate, depending on the level of abstraction one is looking with. The debate can go on and the search can go on without terminating at any point.

As the starting point of enquiry is a theoretical category, the debating point, also becomes theory, with the data on the

concrete providing an evidence or otherwise, in the intermediate phase.

But on the other hand, if the starting point is concrete, the end point also becomes the concrete, with the theoretical abstractions mediating in between. If the search, for example, is for the causes and the material base for a struggle be it Naxalbari, Srikakulam, Telangana or later day Telangana districts, the search ends up in integrated understanding of the various other struggles and obtains a totality of the concrete. As the point of investigation is the concrete, a concrete in motion, the methodology involves taking into consideration the peoples' problems, their participation and their perception of contradictions in the society.

While the debate on the mode of production in a sense grew out of and is a reflection of peoples' movement, the peoples' movements never formed part of the debate, even by a footnote. So much alienated is the debate from reality, a methodological breakthrough is necessary to bring it back to reality, a breakthrough which makes the struggle the point of investigation of the study of social relations - some breakthrough to do like Sri Sri, when he said “భూ మార్గం పట్టిస్తాను భూ కంపం పుట్టిస్తాను” (I will root it in the Earth, I will make the Earth shake). Possibly, Balagopal's attempts are in this direction.

Though a number of people in the debate claim to adhere to Mao's methodology of research, they tend to ignore the first line of the Communist Manifesto and the last thesis on Feuerbach. One should keep them in the forefront to enrich one self. The book of articles of Balagopal helps one to go in that direction.

Burla
March 1988

RS Rao
Department of Economics
Sambalpur University

Contents

Part I

Agrarian Relations, Struggles and Repression

1. Peasant Struggle and Repression in Peddapally	3
2. Forever 'Disturbed' : Peasant Struggle of Sircilla-Vemulawada	14
3. Murder of a 'Radical'	31
4. Telugu 'Encounters'	39
5. Agrarian Politics by Other Means	52
6. Indravelli 1985	64
7. Over to the Police: New Spate of Encounter Killings	72
8. 'Encounters' and the Supreme Court	88
9. Incarceration of S. A. Rauf: Right to Life vs Security of State	94
10. Agrarian Struggles	102
11. 'Encounter' Killings: Aftermath of Supreme Court Judgment	124
12. Murder of a Veteran Democrat	131
13. <i>Missing</i> : Telugu Desam Style	140
14. Physiognomy of Some Proscribed Poems	147
15. A Tale of Arson	155

Part II

The Ruling Classes, their conflicts and Crises

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 16. A False Resurrection: Rise and Fall of Ramarao | 169 |
| 17. Indira Gandhi: An Attempt at a Political Appraisal | 185 |
| 18. Karamchedu Killings: | 207 |
| The essence of NTR Phenomenon | |
| 19. Anti-Reservation, Yet Once More | 215 |
| 20. Reservations: The Court Says No | 229 |
| 21. Defeat in Victory | 239 |
| 22. Censorship by Force : | 249 |
| A 'Telugu' Prescription for the 'Yellow' Virus | |
| 23. An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied Class - I | 258 |
| 24. Congress (I) vs Telugu Desam Party: | 268 |
| At Last a Lawful Means for Overthrowing
a Lawfully Constituted Government | |

Appendix

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 25. An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied Class - II | 280 |
|--|-----|

Part I

**Agrarian Relations,
Struggles and Repression**

Peasant Struggle and Repression in Peddapally

The peasant struggle of Karimnagar is an important chapter of the Indian agrarian revolution. Both in maturity and depth it has surpassed the Naxalbari flare-up and (arguably) the Srikakulam struggle, from which it has learnt many lessons. The time has not yet come to write its history but it is certainly worthwhile taking a cross-sectional view.

The struggle started in Jagtial (Jagityala) and Sircilla (Sirisilla) talukas, and quickly engulfed Peddapally. Subsequently it has spread to Metpally, Manthani and Huzurabad. The area that has most recently been in the news is Peddapally, where on February 22 this year the CPI (ML) 'People War' organiser Devender Reddy became the 16th victim of police 'encounters' in the 16 months since they were revived in September 1980.

Peddapally is in the northern part of Karimnagar district. It is trisected length-wise by two busy roads; one of them proceeds from the Singareni coal mines region (where coal, power, fertiliser and cement are produced) down to Karimnagar and onwards to Hyderabad, carrying an incessant stream of lorries laden with coal, cement and fertiliser. The other road is the Chanda-Hyderabad highway, passing through forest-rich Adilabad carrying an equally heavy traffic of lorries laden mostly with huge logs of timber and in season crates of juicy oranges from Maharashtra. What is remarkable is that in this steady stream of lorries one rarely sees more than a few carrying bags of paddy or *mirchi* (chillies) - such a common sight in the Vijayawada-Guntur-Eluru region of Green Revolution Andhra.

This is symptomatic of Peddapally, a region that transmits products of ‘capitalist’ India but has itself remained largely feudal. The taluka president of the Radical Youth League could think of only four landlords in the whole taluka who had tractors (in contrast with Jagtial where many landlords have turned modern). None of the landlords show any interest in crops other than paddy and millets, and even then they do not go in for fertiliser-hungry high-yielding varieties but stick to the traditional ones. This is in spite of the fact that Peddapally now gets water from the Pochampad project (on the Godavari river), as a consequence of which the price of land has appreciated from about Rs 3,000 to Rs 20,000 per (wet) acre. A second reason for describing the region as feudal is that the surplus appropriated by the landlords is not transformed into productive capital but instead is either consumed or ‘invested’ in mercantile activities. Unlike the rich kulaks of Green Revolution Andhra, the landlords of Peddapally do not even invest in rice mills. Husking is done domestically, though many of them use machines for the purpose. Most of the surplus goes into PWD contracts (including the Pochampad canal itself), shops (the favourites being ‘wine’ shops), and real estate in Karimnagar town or Hyderabad city. The most notorious case is that of a Velama landlord of Jagtial who owns about 18 bus routes plying along *kuccha* roads joining villages to towns like Ramagundam, Peddapally and Dharmaram. He is said to bribe PWD people into keeping the roads *kuccha* so that the State Road Transport Corporation may not invade his *jagir*.

Finally, a sizeable section of the working people are exploited feudally. They are not tenant-peasants (tenancy has not developed to any considerable extent in Telangana) but feudal farm-servants. What makes them feudal is not that they are paid annually instead of daily (indeed, many of them are

paid monthly) but that their wages are not calculated on the basis of the amount of work they do (whether that is computed in terms of quantity of output or labour-time), instead they are required to be at the beck and call of the landlord and to look after an indeterminate amount of non-productive chores in addition to a varying amount of productive work. In other words what they sell is not their labour-time (labour power employed for a certain time) but their entire time.

However, this alone does not capture the full picture of feudalism in Peddapally. An equally important element is *vetti* or *vettichakiri* (*corvée*; *begar* in Hindi). *Vetti* has been developed to an extraordinarily comprehensive extent in Telangana. Not only do the peasants do *vetti* in the fields of the landlords, *all* the working people suffer this abuse. The dhobi, the shepherd, the barber, the toddy-tapper, everybody has to provide unpaid services on customarily specified occasions. Add to this the abuse of women belonging to the toiling classes by the landlords, and other feudal customs like the working people (particularly those belonging to the lowest castes) being expected not to wear a shirt or chappals in the presence of the *dora* (lord), and you have a complete picture of Peddapally - not in the days of the Nizam Shahi but right up to 1978.

For that was when the dam of anti-feudal agrarian struggle burst in Peddapally. One can conjecture any number of reasons for it. It may be seen as a diffusion of the struggle of the Jagtial and Sircilla talukas which had, by that time, already been declared 'disturbed areas': it may also be seen as a consequence of the Pochampad canal and the increasing commoditisation it brought in its wake (for after all the agrarian revolution is only a democratic revolution); and finally it may be seen as a long-awaited penetration of Communists into an area that was only waiting for them (Karimnagar was not involved as much

as Warangal, Nalgonda and Khammam in the Telangana peasant uprising of 1946-51). Not that Peddapally had earlier been completely innocent of Communist influence; there are some villages which were regarded as CPI 'strongholds': but given the nature of that party's politics during the last two decades, nothing much needs to be said about its ineffectiveness.

The struggle started in 1978 from the villages of Ranapuram and Kannala. The organisation that conducts the struggle is the Rythu Coolie Sangham, an all-purpose organisation whose concerns are far from being merely economic. Problems of caste, sex, corruption, drink - all are handled by the Sangham. In quite a few villages the Sanghams are the only local administrative authority respected by the poor - and in some cases also the rich.

The struggle was initially organised around two issues. One is the wasteland around the village that is often illegally grabbed by the landlords. The people forcibly occupied that land and distributed it among the landless (such occupation of illegally appropriated wasteland is an important element of the struggle in the entire region: the land thus occupied is either divided equally among the landless or cultivated collectively by them - the latter being more common in the tribal regions). The other issue is the 'fines' and 'fees' that the landlords have swallowed from the people during the unofficial 'panchayats' for settling disputes between them. These fees and fines often amount to substantial sums. During the struggle the people demand return of the fees and fines and also additional 'donation' to the Sangham from the landlords in fractional repayment of what has been appropriated from the people in the past. When the State government started giving taluka-level *abkari* contracts (from this year), the Sanghams of various

villages demanded (and got) compensation from the successful bidders for the loss suffered by small brewers. All this amounts to substantial sums of about 10-40,000 rupees per village. This sum is kept with the Sangham and used for common purposes like building schools, laying roads, paying teachers, getting tanks bunded, etc. (This work, which has demonstrated to the people that even at a constructive level the Sanghams are different from the ruling class parties, appears to be among the lessons learnt since the Srikakulam days: in those days such work would have been regarded as 'Revisionistic'.)

All this came later, of course. The first struggle in Ranapuram and Kannala, led by Devender Reddy (a native of Ranapuram), then a lean and dutiful looking college dropout, was for occupation of 300 acres of wasteland appropriated by the landlords. The success of this struggle led to the people of Palthem, Dongaturthi, Ramayapalle and Racchapalle villages inviting Devender Reddy to organise them to struggle for getting back from the landlords the fees and fines that had in the past been collected from them.

As the movement spread, retaliation by the landlords (with willing help from the State) also increased. In quick succession police camps were set up in Chintalapalli, Takkellapalli, Raginedu, Kukkalagudur and Putnur. The way the camps were set up is instructive. Takkellapalli and Raginedu are dominated by a certain Srinivasa Rao; he has lands in the latter village and at Takkellapalli he manages the lands of a landlord Mutyam Rao (most of the landlords of this region are Velamas by caste) who died some time back. Mutyam Rao left behind a son, but he is an invalid and a rake of the worst feudal kind to boot, and spends all his time at Hyderabad. Way back in 1978, Srinivasa Rao beat up and detained two peasants; thereafter, people from 15 villages went to his house, caught hold of his

two sons, and held him to ‘ransom’; claiming that they would give back his sons only if he released the peasants he had detained. The exchange took place, but immediately the police moved in, charged 800 people with abduction (the case has been dismissed) and set up police camps at both Raginedu and Takkellapalli; the camps are yet to be lifted, after nearly four years.

The names of Bhoomaiah and Kishta Goud, who were executed during the Emergency, are well known. Bhoomaiah belonged to Putnur and his piece of land was in Kukkalagudur. In January 1979, it was decided to build a memorial for them in the latter village and a public meeting was held, which was attended by about 15,000 people. This appears to have scared the landlords of the two villages, for they took to the offensive soon after the meeting. When the people of Putnur questioned the landlord Rajeswara Rao about wasteland and surplus land in his possession, he complained to the police that he had been attacked. A police camp was immediately set up at the village: it is still to be removed. At Kukkalagudur, landlord and PWD contractor Rajaiah (one-time CPI sarpanch of the village) started malicious propaganda against the Sangham and the tussle that it led to brought a police camp to the village, which was removed only this January.

The presence of a police camp in a village automatically means that a police raj is established there, with no law except that of the lathi. Accounts of the repression unleashed by the police in these villages make macabre reading. They destroyed crops by driving animals into fields ripe for harvesting or by stopping water supply and destroying the crops (it is a general rule that water from the local tank has to pass by the landlords’ fields to reach other people’s fields and so the police only have to enlist the help of the only-too-willing landlords to stop water

supply to the peasants' crops); if a peasant had a motor to draw water from a well, they would smash the motor and throw it into the well; if a peasant went into hiding they would raid his house and throw clothes, utensils and bags of paddy into the well. Narla Kishtaiah and his brother Narla Bucchimallu of Putnur have suffered loss of about Rs 15,000 because of such degradations. Ellenki Ramaswamy of Takkellapalli had his poultry destroyed and birds stolen while he was in hiding from the police. Perhaps the worst sufferer is Galipalli Parvatalu a casual labourer at the Kesoram Cement Factory (owned by the Birlas) near Takkellapalli who does not have any property to be despoiled; so they attacked his person. His courage in exposing the misdeeds of the police enraged them and they ill-treated him badly at the police camp at Takkellapalli. He was thrown on the ground and one end of a rifle was forcibly thrust into his stomach. His intestines were badly damaged and in spite of an operation he is still unwell. Being landless, he can live only if he works with his hands; but today he cannot do the most common work casual labourers at a cement factory are required to do, that is, loading and unloading cement bags.

But none of these brutalities could stop the movement from spreading, under the leadership of Devender Reddy. He appears to have been quite an extraordinary leader; the poor people of the villages of Peddapally talk in glowing terms about his dedication, integrity and tirelessness. He would lead the people in their hundreds, red flags in hand, to plant the flags in waste/surplus land and then till it against all odds. Near Takkellapalli, there is a tree-covered hillock which was being despoiled by the landlord, and which Devender Reddy led the people of the village to occupy and plant with teak and bamboo trees. The Sangham has also taken on the duty of guarding the hillock, and nobody is allowed to cut the trees, not even

members of the Sangham. When the plants are fully grown, the Sangham will itself supervise cutting and sale of the timber (and undertake simultaneous replanting) whose proceeds will go to the Sangham and will be used to pay an additional teacher at the school, or strengthen the tank-bund, etc (that, at any rate, is what the Sangham leaders plan, and would certainly have implemented had Devender Reddy not been killed; but after his killing the police have started impounding the amounts with the Sanghams, and in some villages like Palakurti, have even charged the Sangham leaders with stealing/misappropriating the amount).

But the most significant achievement of the struggle led by Devender Reddy is that *vetti* has been completely put an end to; hereafter no landlord in Peddapally can hope to get unpaid services from any category of toilers, nor can he misbehave with women of lower castes. The struggle for increased wages has also been successful; whereas earlier daily labourers used to get Rs 3-4 per day, they now get Rs 6-7; farm-servants have also increased their monthly wage to Rs 100. Curiously enough, the struggle for higher wages is generally listed as an afterthought in any discussion with Sangham leaders: it is not clear whether this indicates the relative ease with which these struggles were won or the weakly developed commodity-consciousness of the people.

All this could not be allowed to go on, of course. Devender Reddy had to go, and he went. There was nothing very secretive about the arrangements made, either. The 'encounter' in which he died was with sub-inspector Prakash Reddy of Ramagundam. At the magisterial enquiry conducted into his death on March 16, Prakash Reddy told the RDO of Peddapally that "*as of 22/12/81 he had been deputed on special duty along with four police constables to apprehend underground cadre of*

extremists, Devender Reddy". His jurisdiction was the whole of Peddapally and Sultanabad talukas. It took him almost exactly two months to get his quarry, and in the process he raised such hell in the villages of the area that when the people are not talking about their leader Devender Reddy, they are talking about their tormenter Prakash Reddy. Destroying property, breaking the walls of wells, throwing clothes on the road and riding his jeep over them, beating women for the sin of feeding Devender Reddy on his secret visits, thrashing members of the Sangham to the bone, spreading slanderous stories about Devender Reddy, accusing him of misappropriating the funds collected in the name of the Sanghams and of misbehaving with women (the people are more enraged about these slanders than about the murder) - Prakash Reddy created a reign of terror that lasts to this day. Now, he visits the villages with the question: 'Has your new leader come? Who is he?'

Under his protection, the landlords have become more assertive; at Chintalapalli, the landlords forcibly took back from the Sangham the one lakh rupees that they had been forced to part with against illegal fees and fines they had collected in the past. In nearby Guruvapalli, the Sangham had similarly taken Rs 5,000 from the landlord, this time a Reddy. The day after the enquiry into Devender Reddy's death, the landlords acquired enough courage to get the sarpanch (who is sympathetic to the Sangham) arrested on the charge of extortion. The question 'How are the landlords of your village?' put to a woman of the village riding a bullock-cart elicited the angry answer: 'They have become as before'. At Putnur, with the coming of Prakash Reddy, the police and the landlords barred the toddy-tappers from climbing Palmyra trees for three months, causing loss of 7-8 thousand rupees. If somebody stood surety for arrested Sangham activists, very soon they

would find themselves also under arrest. Quite a few sarpanches of the taluka have been arrested under spurious charges, for the sin of having stood surety for activists of their villages. Sarpanches sympathetic to the peasant movement are a peculiarity of Peddapally taluka. The 'Peoples War' group of the CPI (ML), which is leading the struggle there, boycotts all elections as a general rule but individuals sympathetic to the party do manage to get elected to local bodies as independent candidates against landlord-backed Congress (I) candidates.

Even as he was creating terror in the villages, Prakash Reddy was hatching a plot to get at his quarry. Dharmaram is a village on the Hyderabad-Chanda road, about 40 kms from Karimnagar. The landlord of Dharmaram is a Velama, Damodar Rao, who has about 500 acres of land, (In the words of Lal Mohammed, a tea shop owner of Dharmaram, 'landceilings have not come to our village, they have stopped at Karimnagar'). About 9 kms from Dharmaram along a kuccha road, is Khila Wanaparti, a medium-sized village. The landlords of this village are also Velamas, many of them relatives of Damodar Rao. One of them is the police patel (*mansab*) of the village. He and his brother together own about 100 acres of land. Their farm-servants, Narsaiah and Pochamallu, had also been leaders of the Sangham of the village; the movement was new to the village and revolutionary ideology had not struck roots there. Narsaiah and Pochamallu were therefore ideal candidates for conspiring to trap Devender Reddy. They brought him to the village on the pretext of wanting to discuss their resignation from the Sangham with him, and informed the police. Prakash Reddy came to the village at dusk and approached Narsaiah's hut, where his prey was talking to some people. Warned about his arrival, Devender Reddy attempted to run away, but he was overpowered from behind and killed.

The story that his own revolver went off during the scuffle and killed him is obvious nonsense. With the increasing clamour of civil liberties groups about bogus encounters, the police have changed their tack; they no longer even claim to have killed in self-defence: these days the deaths are accidental. And perhaps soon they will become voluntary.

Anyway, apart from the sub-inspector, the only people prepared to support the story (at the executive magistrate's enquiry) were the conspirators Narsaiah and Pochamallu; and the story of the latter was so unbelievable that the executive magistrate was himself constrained to comment that Pochamallu was lying. He was supposed to have been running ahead of Devender Reddy, but his statement corroborates in full detail the sub-inspector's version of what happened behind his back. The truth is known to the people of the village but they refuse to tell it even to sympathetic civil liberties organisations, let alone to the enquiring magistrate. Such is the terror created by sub-inspector-on-special-duty, Prakash Reddy.

EPW, 15.05.1982

Forever ‘Disturbed’

Peasant Struggle of Sircilla-Vemulawada

‘Revoke the disturbed areas proclamation in Sircilla and Jagtial!’ is a slogan found splattered on the walls of Telangana towns. What used to be Sircilla (pronounced Sirsilla) at the time of the ‘Disturbed Areas’ proclamation in October 1978 has subsequently been cut into two talukas, Sircilla and Vemulawada, so that Vemulawada was, so to speak, born a ‘Disturbed Area’. The bifurcating line is the Karimnagar-Kamareddy road, with Vemulawada lying to the north of the road and Sircilla to the south. Together they occupy the south-west corner of Karimnagar district.

The eyes of academics are yet to fall on the Karimnagar peasant struggle, but when they do, they will no doubt be impressed by the fact that it was also in the 1970’s that the Pochampad project on the Godavari river started watering substantial parts of Karimnagar. Fitting in well, as this does, with popular academics’ theories of peasant struggles (built around the irrigation-capital penetration-differentiation syndrome), this will no doubt spawn rich-peasant theories *a la* Barry Pavier, who managed to read the Telangana peasant uprising of the latter half of the forties as a peanut and castor revolution riding the ebb and flow of the lubrication needs of European army and industry.

But a slight difficulty which academics with a capital-penetration hang-up will face is that while the canal passes

through the northern talukas of the district, the struggle started in the Sircilla-Vemulawada region, and that too not in the partly rice-cultivating Sircilla half which is at least fractionally watered by the 40 year old Upper Manair project on the Manair, a tributary of the Godavari, but in the predominantly *jowar* and maize cultivating shrub-forest region of Vemulawada. This September, about eight weeks this side of the *kharif* harvest, Vemulawada presents a desolate picture (even allowing for the unusual drought) of bushes and rocky soil, dotted with man-high stalks and maize and *jowar*.

An objective reading of the actual situation indicates that it was no penetration of capital but penetration of Communist cadre that sparked off the struggle. The old taluka of Sircilla was in fact among the few areas of Karimnagar district to be militantly involved in the peasant uprising of the forties. A guerrilla squad's raid on the Sircilla police station on June 10, 1950 is recounted by P. Sundarayya (in his *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons*) as a turning point which led to a militant mass uprising against feudal oppression and the State's food-grain levy in many villages of Karimnagar district. (As a solitary relic of those heroic days, Sircilla sends a CPI legislator, Ch Rajeswara Rao - not to be confused with the general secretary of the party - to the AP Assembly). But the present struggle can be regarded as a revival of the old militancy only in a symbolic sense. For at the time of the 1964 split all the leaders (and hence also the cadre) of Karimnagar district stayed with the CPI - the lone exception being a brief adventure by Baddam Yella Reddy who was with the CPI (M) for three months before scuttling back to the CPI. And consequently, when the revolutionary Communists came out of the CPI(M) after 1967, in Karimnagar there was nobody to come out and nothing to come out from. Those who lead the present movement were

political greenhorns in 1970 who have grown with the movements, so much so that few of the revolutionary communist leaders of Karimnagar are far on the wrong side of thirty.

The Beginning

They entered the north-western part of old Sircilla (western part of present Vemulawada) in 1970-71, from Nizamabad district, crossing a range of what might pass for hills in the eyes of a particularly unimaginable midget. They were, apparently, impelled by nothing more material than The Spring Thunder of 1967, abetted by repression in Armoor taluka of Nizamabad where they had been working till then. What they encountered in Sircilla was a dry shrub-forest region and villages dominated by archetypal feudalism of Asaf Jahi vintage. True, the '*doras*' (lords) were no longer Deshmukhs or *jagirdars*, but they were little different in substance.

Until the declaration of the Emergency the struggle was mainly concentrated in a few villages with Nimmapally, Konaraopet and Veerannapally at centre-stage. In Nimmapally the *dora* was Bontala Bhaskara Rao, who is said to have had 1,600 acres of land; in this as well as dozens of other cases of *doras* whose landholding acreage runs into monstrous figures, the allegation looks hardly credible until one realises that the ownership is neither legal nor even *benami*, but rather that he exercises his domination over large areas of common village land, forest land, shrub land, tank- beds and stream-beds, land not recorded in anybody's name, and even uncultivable wasteland. This is not because he gets any profit out of it but to prevent access to it to the village poor (and not-so poor); in other words, it is an exercise of feudal authority par excellence, and not ownership in the strict (i.e. bourgeois) sense.

At some point of time in the fifties this Bhaskara Rao's father or grandfather had given 22 acres of 'his' land to some *Harijan* families; the reason is said to be his desire to be on good terms with the working people of the village in the aftermath of the armed peasant uprising. It is to be added that Sundarayya refers to this village Nimmapally (as also Veerannapally) as a 'Communist stronghold' in those days. But come the seventies, these 22 acres had the good fortune to come under a small project on a stream called Mulavagu which was expected to water about 2,500 acres of land (it was completed in 1978). So Bhaskara Rao wanted the land back and evicted the *Harijan* families. They approached the party - later to become the CPI (ML) led by Chandra Pulla Reddy - which had by that time started propaganda activities in some neighbouring villages. By 1973, Rythu Coolie Sanghams (peasant and agricultural labourers unions) were formed in Nimmapally, Konaraopet and Veerannapally. The Sangham gave a call to the *Harijans* to occupy the 22 acres and plant it with sesamum. The *dora* hired goondas to attack the *Harijans* who were forced to retreat. The next year, people from the three villages were mobilised to occupy the land, and in the conflict that ensued, the police entered, set up camps in the three villages, and booked a large number of people under the Sircilla Conspiracy Case. (Those were the days when conspiracy cases were in fashion with the police; since most of them have been dismissed by the courts, the police seem to have lately lost some of their enthusiasm for them.) This case was also subsequently withdrawn for lack of evidence, but meanwhile the 22 acres reverted to the *dora*.

Repression and Resistance

What is worth recording is not details of feudal oppression and resistance (which recur monotonously from village to

village) but the strategy and tactics developed by the people, particularly under conditions of repression. Since the days of the Nimmappally struggle they have adopted the tactics that in times of repression ‘expansion is the main form of resistance, followed by consolidation in the areas of expansion’. Repression in Nimmappally led to expansion to neighbouring villages, followed by consolidation in the form of developing struggles on other issues - beedi-leaf picking, wages of agricultural labourers and farm-servants, rural administrative corruption, etc. Between the two aborted attempts to occupy the 22 acres of land described above (in 1973 and 1974), the movement spread to students and youth in Sircilla and Vemulawada towns, and the Nimmappally struggle was publicised through a play called ‘*Naandi*’ (Prologue). They also took up the beedi-leaf struggle as part of the ‘expansion and consolidation’ tactics. The beedi-leaf struggle has actually been a perennial affair ever since the revolutionary Communists started organising the tribals and other working people in the Godavari Valley region (that is to say, since the early seventies); and though the Vemulawada shrub-forest is not part of the Godavari Valley forest, the beedi-leaf struggle there has very much been part of the general struggle.

Every year, before the summer sets in the beedi-leaf (called *tuniki* leaf) is ready for picking. That being a lean season for agriculture, picking the leaf is a source of much needed income for the landless and poor peasants. Earlier, it used to be that they would pick the leaf and sell it to contractors (called *guttedars*) at the rate of 2 or 3 *paisa* per bundle of one hundred leaves. The sale takes place at the village ‘*kalla*’ where the contractor’s agent (*kalledar*) would buy it. It is typical of the feudal atmosphere prevalent in the area that even in this seemingly ‘business-like’ transaction the contractor would

extract 'unpaid' labour; one or two out of every ten bundles or so would be taken for 'free' in the name of various deities, and the first bundle in the day brought to the *kalla* by a labourer would be taken for 'free' as an auspicious omen.

Government to the Rescue

The Sanghams took up a struggle to end these feudal practices and increase payment for the beedi-leaf. It led to a quick reaction from the government, which nationalised the trade to save the contractors. The action is actually a test case of nationalisation being used to save the private sector for the government did not set up either co-operatives or a public sector corporation to procure the beedi-leaf, but instead undertook to buy the leaf from the pickers (and thereby bear the brunt of their agitation) and subsequently sell it to the contractors who would additionally pay royalty corresponding to the amount purchased. Even here, the government has not deputed the Forest Department to make the purchase but allows the contractors' agents (the *kalladars*) to directly purchase the leaf, and even advances them finance for the purpose. Indeed, the only effect of the nationalisation has been, on the one hand, to make the Forest Department bear the brunt of the pickers' agitation, leaving the contractors sitting pretty, and on the other to make room for plenty of corruption. For now the contractors in league with the forest officials understate the amount of leaf purchased and make a killing in royalty thus saved. The bribes paid by the beedi-leaf *guttadars* to the district forest officials is estimated to run into tens of thousands of rupees per season.

The beedi-leaf struggle is a story by itself but its relevance to the Sircilla story is that in times of severe repression of the anti-feudal struggle, it has served as a medium for the tactics

of ‘resistance through expansion and consolidation’. In 1975 the Sangham was again active in Nimmappally, this time with a programme of picking the tamarind crop on the disputed 22 acres. Bhaskara Rao fenced the land and got the tamarind trees painted with a white band, signifying his proprietorship. The *Harijans* removed the fence, painted the bands red, and declared that the land and crops were theirs.

This resulted in further repression, but by this time the tactics of resistance through expansion had paid, and the people were not deterred. Soon, however, Emergency was proclaimed, and the entire movement met with a setback. But in the meantime it had, in its process of consolidating the expansion, taken up concrete struggles in most of the villages of the area against feudal oppression, and hence could go into hibernation awaiting the lifting of the Emergency.

Struggle against Feudal Oppression

While the movement went into hibernation in the Nimmappally area, once again the tactics of ‘resistance through expansion’ was adopted, and they moved down to the south of the Karimnagar-Kamareddy road into the western part of present Sircilla taluka. Their predicament was that they could no longer function in the name of the Rythu Coolie Sangham (let alone the party), but in this area they found a situation they could utilise. About 30 to 40 villages of this area covering about 17,000 acres of land are watered by the Upper Manair project. Even before the Emergency, there had been a ‘*Harijan* movement’ in the area against untouchability and for higher pay for farm-servants. An equally important cause was resisting the feudal habit of people getting their feuds settled by the *dora* (which, apart from reinforcing his authority, entails both parties giving gifts to the *dora*, and has always been one of the

principal modes of oppression in feudal Telangana). A Harijan Sangham had been formed to fight for these causes by two *Harijan* farm-servants - Ramulu of Gudem and Mallaiah of Cheekodu. They built their struggle around the demand for implementing Indira Gandhi's notorious twenty-point programme (it is not clear whether this was out of cunning or ingeniousness). The revolutionary refugees from Nimmapally joined this Harijan Sangham and for quite some time did not reveal their difference of ideology; instead, so long as the Emergency lasted, they would express their demands in the language of the twenty-point programme. But slowly, they started changing the nature of the Harijan Sangham and by the end of the Emergency it was replaced by the Rythu Coolie Sangham. Both Ramulu and Mallaiah are today with the CPI (ML), though their language (as that of practically all the activists of this area) betrays their caste-struggle origins; whereas activists of other areas refer to their oppressors as *dora* (lord) or *bhooswami* (landlord); activists of this area often slip into the old habit of referring to them as 'those Reddys and Raos'. (Rao refers to the Velama caste, though not every Rao need be a Velama.)

Any village-by-village recounting of the oppression and struggles would be monotonous if it is brief, and unwieldy if it is sufficiently elaborate to capture the variations from village to village. The struggle was mainly aimed against feudal social oppression which takes on a fantastic variety of forms in Telangana. *Vetti* or *Vettichakiri* (*begar*) in all its myriad manifestations is the most striking characteristic of feudalism in Telangana. Not only do the peasants perform 'unpaid' productive labour in the *doras'* fields, working people of all castes have to do *vetti*, toddy-tappers have to provide free toddy, potters have to provide pots free, and so on right through the

caste structure. Some of the castes (dhobis, barbers, etc) even have to perform *vetti* household labour unrelated to their caste occupation. More generally, any object (whether human or otherwise) that happens to catch the *dora's* fancy is his for the asking and taking.

It was against this *vetti* that the first struggle of the erstwhile Harijan Sangham had started in Gudem; and to the end, one major struggle was to put an end to the practice of shepherds (*golla* caste) being forced to give 'free' sheep and goats to the *doras*. Apart from ritual gifts of sheep (on festival days such as Dasara), a certain number had to be given annually - often running to 30 or 40 per village. Another peculiar form of *vetti* which is particularly important in irrigated and paddy-cultivating regions such as this cluster of villages under the Upper Manair project, is forced and unpaid fertilisation: in the fallow period prior to the *kharif* sowing, the *doras* demand that the sheep of all the *gollas* in the village should spend the nights in their lands and fertilise it. This is called *vettimandalu* (*mandalu* is plural for *manda*, meaning flock). Usually the *doras'* demand would run into two to three months per year, and as the peasants put it, "what can't you grow on the land after that?" There is the interesting case of a seemingly 'modern' landlord, Madhava Rao of Pothur, who uses this feudal authority to claim *vettimandalu* for more than six months in a year and grows high-yield varieties of rice to such effect that he has received the district award for 'enterprising farmers'! In fact, the issues of forced 'gifts' of sheep and forced fertilisation of land appear to have been among the principal points of the Sircilla struggle - which is natural, considering that in a predominantly shrub country, rearing sheep is one of the few remunerative activities. The struggle against forced gifts of sheep is aimed not only at the landlords but also against forest officials, right down to

the chowkidars. They do not collect fines for grazing sheep on forest land, but instead demand a 'gift' of a few sheep per year, much as the landlord demands gifts of sheep in compensation for allowing grazing in 'his' land.

Vetti Abolished

Here is a sample of the severity of the struggle against *vetti* sheep, though it happened much after the Emergency, during 1978-80. The village is Namapuram, and the landlords are Reddys. The biggest of them (both named Narayana Reddy) are said to still 'own' about 500 acres of land, including 100 acres of wasteland. All the landlords together used to demand - and get - 40 *vetti* sheep annually until, in 1978, the shepherds decided to stop this exploitation and refused to give sheep on the occasion of Dasara. Some youth from landlord families were incensed with this, and waylaid shepherds driving back their flocks in the evening and forcibly took some goats. Later, the shepherds went in a group and got the goats back. In 1979 the refusal of the shepherds was repeated at the time of a marriage in a Reddy family. Reacting to this, the landlords got hold of some sheep on the pretext that they were grazing on their land and locked them up in a public enclosure. The people took out a procession demanding release of the sheep and achieved it, but about a month later, when the people of the village went to Sircilla to attend a public meeting, the landlords once again arrested the sheep and demanded Rs. 250 as fine; the shepherds paid the fine but did not resume the feudal donation of sheep and goats.

Realising that the people were adamant, the landlords formed a 'Rythu Sangham' to fight the Rythu Coolie Sangham of the people. They brought pliable 'elders' of the *golla* caste from neighbouring villages, and forced the local shepherds to

accept a settlement of a smaller quantum of gifts: the number of *vetti* sheep came down from 40 to 24, and the shepherds had to pay a fine of Rs. 500 to boot. Later in the year, there was a taluka-wide movement against fines (or rather bribes) collected by the Forest Department for grazing sheep in forest land; as part of that, a procession was taken out in Sircilla town, to which shepherds from Namapuram also went; once again the landlords got another flock of sheep arrested. The shepherds, under the leadership of the Sangham, decided to get the animals released by mobilising their caste-fellows from neighbouring villages; accordingly, 100 people came in a procession and got the sheep released. Come 1980, one of the landlords once again refused shepherds the facility of grazing sheep on the land under his occupation and collected Rs. 100 as fine; such incidents continue, but they are in the nature of a last flicker, for the abolition of '*vetti*' is final.

The protracted nature of this struggle indicates how strongly entrenched feudal practices are, and at the same time the basic orientation of the struggle, which is not a conflict between commodity producing peasant 'enterprise' and land monopoly, but rather between toiling people and feudal relations, for which land monopoly is merely the underpinning. Where land is an issue, it is neither irrigated land nor dry land suitable for commercial cultivation (and hence coveted by the enterprising peasant), but infertile semi-wasteland which is nevertheless attractive to the landless because they can grow inferior varieties of grain on it, and is viewed equally covetously by the landlord because he naturally wishes to keep the landless, landless. It is feudal authority, captured perfectly by the Telugu word '*pettamdari*' that has always been the focus of peasant struggle in Telangana, whatever peculiar interpretations may be hung on them by capital-obsessed observers.

After the Emergency

After the lifting of the Emergency, both the Party and the Sanghams started functioning openly. They also extended from the two western pockets to the north-eastern part of the old taluka (eastern part of present Vemulawada); here, in villages like Nukalamarri, the Party had had contacts and had run night schools during the Emergency; after 1977, Sanghams were quickly established in a large number of villages of the area. Parallely, in Nimmappally to the west, the old struggle for the 22 acres of *Harijans'* land was again taken up.

A landmark in the post-Emergency movement is an incident that happened at the time of a visit by Sharada Mukherjee, then Governor of AP, to Vemulawada town sometime in 1977. The Party mobilised a large number of people from all the villages where they were leading struggles, to take out a procession in Vemulawada and submit a representation to her. They were prevented by a contingent of policemen lead by a DSP. The people were so enraged that they threatened to throw the DSP into the holy tank of the local temple (Vemulawada is a temple town, described by local pride as 'Dakshina Kasi'); when the DSP was adamant, they were so eager to implement their threat that the leaders of the Sangham had to intervene and save the life of the policeman.

Of course, such heroism had to be paid for. Cases were booked against 70 people, and the incident looms large in the story of every village of the eastern part of Vemulawada taluka where the movement entered after the Emergency. The movement here is centred around a few core villages like Nukalamarri, Chekkapally and Kodurupaka. While Nukalamarri is dominated by one Bhaskara Rao (a landlord of 150 acres), who is said to be brother-in-law of AICC (I)

general secretary, Satyanarayana Rao, Chekkapally is a neighbouring village ruled by Bhagawanta Rao, a particularly atrocious landlord; at Kodurupaka the *dora* is Venkatarama Rao, brother-in-law of Bhagawanta Rao. This trio has been the centre of a (by now) five-year old struggle in about 70 villages in the area. While Bhaskara Rao refused to part with 10 acres of land to his erstwhile tenant who claimed it under the State's tenancy legislation, Bhagawanta Rao had the unique distinction of getting all his land tilled and cultivated by *vetti*; he also used to have about 10 to 20 servants working at his house without payment. Trouble for him started when three of his servants approached the CPI (ML) and started a Sangham in 'his' village. When the fight against him became severe he used his feudal authority to mobilise some of the people of his village and take out a procession from Vemulawada to Chekkapally, chanting 'Bhagawanta Rao is Bhagawan'; but a counter-procession by the Sangham a couple of days later cured the people of their awe. An incident that took place during this struggle (and which attracted a certain amount of attention because of the visit of a PUCL team from Delhi) was the rape of an elderly woman, Rajavva, by goondas employed by landlord Venkatarama Rao of Kodurupaka village. It was an entirely 'political rape', expressly to punish Rajavva for organising a militant Mahila Sangham. (The Sircilla movement has seen the birth of such Mahila Sanghams in 20-25 villages, mostly as a consequence of severe repression which drove the men away from the village). The latest position is that the case against the goondas of Venkatarama Rao has been dismissed, but Rajavva is full of grit and determination and is willing to fight to the end.

The disturbed areas proclamation has certainly strengthened the hands of the *doras*, but the backbone of their

domination - feudal *pettamdari* relations - has been irretrievably broken. Open struggle may today be much more difficult than before 1978, but nevertheless the situation has undergone a basic transformation. The concrete achievements are that the original starting point of the entire movement - the 22 acres of Nimmapally - have been finally given to the *Harijans*; the beedi-leaf movement is well organised and today the rate paid is 10 to 12 *paisa* per bundle, with all *vetti*-bundles abolished. The wages of agricultural labourers and farm-servants have gone up. (Though these issues are perennial and come to the fore twice each cropping season, at the time of transplanting and harvesting paddy, and take the form of a massive taluka-wide movement, they get merely passing mention in conversation with peasant activists - all their most serious attention is fixed on the struggle against feudal *pettamdari*). Most vitally, *vetti* has completely vanished and so has the habit of *doras* sitting in judgment over village disputes. These last are easy to state, but they imply a total change in the life of rural Telangana. Most of the *doras*, including the notorious ones like Bhagawanta Rao of Chekkapally have left their villages, sold substantial parts of their land and today live in Karimnagar or Hyderabad.

Social Boycott

Not that they gave up the struggle lightly. Apart from Rajavva, there are many other woman, like Lakshmi of Boinpally, who were raped by landlord goondas. Apart from Jakkula Elliah of Doomala who was killed when police fired on a 3,000 strong procession in Sircilla town in January 1980, there were activists like Lakshmirajam of Timmapuram who were killed by landlords. Indeed it would be very wrong to think that the *doras* were content with the police help that was liberally given to them before and after the disturbed areas

proclamation. They were feudal to begin with and feudal to the end. They trained and armed their own gangs to fight the peasants, and regarded the police only as a standby; there is, for example, the case of Jagga Rao of Jogapuram who had 40 swords made to arm his gang with. Others, under the able leadership of Papa Rao, president of Vemulawada Samiti (block), train robber gangs to commit thefts in the name of the 'Naxalite party' and alienate the people from the Party. Especially after achieving basic victories like abolition of *vetti*, and driving away most of the landlords from the villages, one of the principal activities of the movement is to apprehend these robber gangs and force the police to arrest them (it takes considerable forcing, as can be imagined).

But the people's resistance is as varied as their enemy's offensive. The myth of the 'Naxalite cult of violence' has been as assiduously cultivated and propagated that some of the forms adopted by them might not be believed. For instance, after the declaration of the area as a disturbed area the police took to raiding villages during night times. To prevent this, entire villages (barring only the landlords and their henchmen) would stay awake, singing traditional folk or devotional songs, or listening to a *Haridas* recounting mythological tales. Or else they would sit outside their homes and keep up a massive racket throughout the night beating aluminium plates with ladles or metal tumblers. At the time of the seasonal struggles for higher rate for beedi-leaf and higher wages for paddy transplanting or harvesting, the police are forewarned and move into villages in strength to see that even posters calling for a strike are not pasted. In some places the Sanghams adopted an ingenious tactic to counter this: cowherds driving cattle back into the villages at dusk were charged with the duty of pasting posters; they would drive in the cattle in a rush, scatter the police

standing in watch by the roadside and paste the posters before the police could recover. Indeed, it should be obvious to anyone not blinded by motivated propaganda that a mass movement cannot help adopting mass tactics. Similarly, those who ritually complain that Indian Communists have taken into cognisance cultural factors specific to India - like caste - would probably like to know (or perhaps not) that one of the strongest weapons in the anti-feudal struggle has always been what they call 'social boycott'. One of the defining qualities of Hindu '*dharma*' being abhorrence of manual labour, boycott of the household work of landlords by toiling castes is as powerful a weapon in the anti-feudal struggle as a strike by productive workers is in the struggle against capital. Since men and women of landlord families do not perform any 'menial' chores, boycott by *dhobis*, barbers and *Harijans* is often sufficient to bring the landlords down on their knees, and is generally the first tactic employed in most villages. It works particularly well with Velama landlords, for the Velamas are a more haughty lot than the Reddys.

More Sophisticated Repression

Today, the struggle is characterised by severe repression and greater sophistication of the enemy. It is not that as a consequence of the struggle "feudalism has gone and capitalism has come". As the activists clearly recognise, what has happened is much more complex than that. The *doras* - those who have not left the villages, that is to say - have changed the more obnoxious of their *pettamdari* spots, and become more 'democratic' in their outward behaviour. Whereas earlier much of their land used to be cultivated by *vetti* labour or by 'bonded' farm-servants, or, at best, by rent-paying tenants, today many of them give their land 'for a share', i.e. they get it share-cropped. The share is fifty-fifty, both costs (on wet land) and

produce. They no longer get *vetti*, but now they extract payment through different means. The various 'development strategies' adopted by the State have given the *doras* a chance to turn into brokers and suck the people's marrow. Yet they are not ordinary brokers working for a 'normal' commission but take the form of 'village elders' who represent to the government's development agencies on behalf of the villagers - and graciously accept what are modestly called 'expenses'. This role is, of course, facilitated by the fact that many of them are now chairmen of land mortgage banks and agricultural banks, presidents of cooperative credit societies, and of panchayat *samitis*, leaders of political parties, and so on. A good example is the CPI leader, Ch Rajeswara Rao, scion of a Desai family, one of whose brothers is vice president of a district agricultural bank, and another a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

In other words the essentially patriarchal relation has now been given a new mode of expression. True, this new mode of expression entails a difference in that it splits the toiling people and makes unity of action more difficult than earlier - a variant of the trite observation that 'capital differentiates'. However, it is not difficulty of uniting the poor that worries the activists, but the problem of facing police repression. Repression is today so severe that in all but a few villages of the two talukas it is nearly impossible to discuss the movement openly with the people.

(Co-authored with M. Kodandarami Reddy)

EPW, 27.11.1982

Murder of a ‘ Radical’

Large parts of Warangal district present a desolate landscape which no poet - or peasant - will ever get excited over. Rocky soil, huge and startlingly bald boulders which pretend to be hills, endless thorny bushes which apparently even goats find unappetising, and an occasional grove of tamarind trees - this is the recurring picture. The Godavari runs past the district, but unlike Karimnagar, Warangal is yet to benefit from the river; barring one or two big tanks, most of the paddy cultivation is under small tanks or wells. The only improvement modernisation has brought is HYV seeds and the extension of electricity to villages, which has increased the acreage of paddy cultivated under wells. But for that, the district remains much as it was in the days of the last Nizam. Perhaps one other difference is that these days villages have telephones, which makes it that much easier for the landlords to call in the police, and generally to keep them informed - a convenience that the harassed Deshmukhs did not have in the forties. But that is a different dimension of the story.

Pisara is a medium-sized village in Ghanpur, one of the most backward talukas of Warangal. It is at the meeting point of two strings of villages which lie along two arcs starting from the Warangal-Hyderabad road. As one approaches Pisara, the bushes and rocks get depressingly predominant; and beyond the village, the world apparently comes to an end, for there are neither any roads nor anything seemingly edible in that direction. RTC buses run to Pisara from Warangal quite

frequently along both arcs, not because Pisara is important, but because it lies at the end of a string of villages. Most of the houses of the village are either thatched or tiled, the only exceptions being those of the landlords and a trader (who probably trades in chillies, which are grown plentifully in the region). Add two or three dusty roads, innumerable lanes, and a sculpted image of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi manufactured by some cruel artist, and you have the picture of an innocent village of Bharat, the injured angel of modern mythology.

Such backwardness does not stop with dusty roads and snotty kids who give a vociferous farewell to the RTC bus as it leaves the village. It does not even stop with the solitary Upper Primary school imparting something resembling education to the children of the village. Nor does it find its starkest expression in the utter lack of proper medical facilities, which forces the villagers to travel all of 55 kms to Warangal to get even routine medical treatment. It permeates the social relations and spurs somewhat severely the idyllic quality of Bharat, where everyone is supposed to be one with the others, and all equally concerned about procurement prices.

Pisara is dominated by three Reddy brothers who have, between them, two sons and about 300 to 400 acres of land. (I am being cautious; ask the *Harijans* of the village, and they will put it at 500 acres.) Given the notoriously unfathomable character of *patwaris'* records, there is not much sense asking how much of it is *patta* land, how much is held *benami*, and how much is recorded officially as 'cultivable wastes' or whatever. Yet these Reddy landlords are not called '*doras*' for the punctilious people distinguished between landlords who take no part whatsoever in cultivation and exercise feudal social domination, and those who have a cultivators' past and even

today are not above setting hand to plough (metaphorically speaking, of course). Only the former category of landlord is called a '*dora*', the latter is an '*asami*' or a '*patel*', irrespective of how much land he might have. The three Reddy brothers of Pisara were actually affluent cultivating peasants at one time but apparently managed to grab the lands of a Deshmukh of old times, whose tenants they were, and who lost his lands in *Jagirdari* abolition. Just one of the three, Tirupati Reddy, has 200 acres. These Reddys would, perhaps, be described by most academics as 'capitalist farmers', for they grow cash crops (chillies), cultivate HYV paddy under wells operated by electric motors, and use plenty of fertiliser. They grow HYV seeds for the National Seeds Corporation, and are said to make a flourishing business of it. One of them even has a small-scale cement pipes manufacturing concern on the Warangal-Hyderabad road. But let us follow the people and refer to them by the academically indeterminate term '*patels*'; for, until the start of our story, each of them used to get their lands cultivated by about 20 to 30 farm-servants (*paleru*), paid miserably low wages, and more or less tied to the landlords by an interest-free advance at the beginning of the year. The farm-servants' time is at the *patel's* disposal, and the amount of work they do has no relation to what they are paid (an invariable concomitant of capitalist relations), but is instead determined exclusively by the *patels*' needs. If we divide their living time into labour time and free time *a la* Marx, then their free time is no more under their control than their labour time. *Vetti* (*begar*) is unknown in Warangal, for the peasant uprising of the late forties took care of that, but the general authority of the *patels* is undisturbed. For instance, a poor peasant by name Mallaiah once purchased two acres of land against the wishes of the landlords, and was harassed until he sold it back. Another, a rich peasant by name Chandra Reddy (who has about 40 acres

of land of varying quality) was not very obedient, and as a consequence, the *patels* got 14 of his acres declared 'surplus' under the ceiling act (while they themselves own land many times the upper limit of the ceiling!). True, Communists continued to exist in Warangal after the late forties, and in the recent Assembly elections the CPI even set up a candidate from Ghanpur, but as a Telugu writer once remarked, around the mid-fifties, the Communists stopped biting and started barking; and nobody has as yet died of dog-bark.

Until the start of our story, there was only one person in the village who openly questioned the authority of the *patels*. He is a school teacher who has no politics other than a partiality for the poor. He did not form any peasant unions, he did not lead strikes, all he did was to agree to act as an elder and settle the internal disputes of the poor and thereby make it unnecessary for them to approach the landlords to sit in judgment. This itself is a significant injury to the authority of the landlords, for the unquestioned right of arbitration has always been among the most powerful weapons in the hands of feudals in Telangana.

Resistance to the *patels* moved a step forward and went down to gut issues about two years ago. That was when the 'Radical Party' entered the village and started organising the farm-servants for higher wages. The name the party gives itself is CPI (ML) (Peoples War), but all over Telangana the people know it as the 'Radical Party'. The name derives from the mass organisations of the party, 'Radical Students Union' and 'Radical Youth League' which, with their annual 'go to villages' campaigns, have been instrumental in carrying the party's message to villages. The word 'radical' is impossible to render accurately into Telugu, but it has now become part of the vocabulary of the poorest strata of people who know no other

word of English. In Warangal and Karimnagar (if not elsewhere) everybody knows what a 'radical' means, and that includes the police too; for the first question they ask any troublesome youth is: are you a radical?

The young man who organised the Rythu Coolie Sangham at Pisara was one Rama Rao, alias Ramana. He was a native of Kazipet, the railway junction, where his mother works as a sweeper in the railway yard. A *Harijan* by caste, he took his bachelor's degree in commerce from a college in Warangal, and worked for some time in the railways in Khammam district. His ability at organising workers was so irksome that he was removed from service, and he came back to Warangal to work in the peasant movement in Ghanpur taluka. His coming had the strongest impact on the farm-servants of Pisara village. Earlier, their wages used to be about Rs 200 in cash per year (plus a similar amount as an interest-free advance) and about 25 kgs of *jowar* per month in kind. Women agricultural labourers used to get only Rs 2 to 3 as wage per day. After the formation of the Sangham, all the wages have moved up by about 50 per cent.

The *patels'* reaction was immediate. The police were called in to handle the active members of the Sangham. During the last one year, the police raided the village three times. The first time they picked up five persons, dropped two of them at the outskirts of the village, and took the other three to Madikonda police station. They were kept there for three days and beaten repeatedly. They were given what has passed into journalistic parlance as 'roller treatment'. The performance was repeated during the second raid. On both these occasions, there was no immediate 'provocation'; the police were obviously on a general offensive - to nip in the bud this nonsense of forming Sanghams and demanding higher wages. That is probably why

they did not foist any false cases, they merely beat up the arrested persons. One of them, Soorayya, was beaten so badly that one of his arms is still in a useless condition, and he is unable to earn his livelihood. The third time they raided the village they had greater provocation. One night, a peasant of the *Golla* (shepherd) caste, Ramaiah by name, fell into a freshly dug well in the fields of his master Konda Reddy, son of Adi Reddy, the eldest of the three '*patels*'. He was taken to a hospital, where he died. Since he was a poor peasant with two young sons and a daughter, the people of the village, under the leadership of Rama Rao, demanded that Konda Reddy should give some land in compensation to the bereaved family. The next day the police again raided the village, entered houses, manhandled and abused women, threatened them with revolvers, and demanded that they reveal Rama Rao's whereabouts.

Actually, none of the achievements of the Sangham constitute a major economic assault on the landlords; but they certainly did question (though they did not succeed in breaking) their authority. And authority is as central to feudal domination as profit is to capitalist relations. Today, where earlier each of the landlords had 20 to 30 farm-servants working for him, there is not a single person in the village willing to work as a *paleru*. All the land of the *patels* is now 'given for a share', i.e., it is share-cropped. The economic gloss apart, the self-assertion of the poor that is involved in this affront was intolerable to the *patels*. This is particularly visible in the case of the fatal accident to Ramaiah.

And so, Rama Rao was murdered. The series of police assaults, in a situation of insufficient politicisation and brittle organisation, had weakened the poor. A section of them were weaned away from the Sangham and made henchmen of the

landlords. Some of them had even been prominent militants of the Sangham earlier. The landlords appear to have got Rama Rao murdered by them a couple of days prior to *Sankranti* (which falls on January 14). He was axed to death, his face disfigured, and the body thrown into a dry ditch. Some goatherds discovered the body on *Sankranti* day, and the news reached the police. In all probability the police knew who he was, and also who had killed him, but to this day they have made no serious attempt to get the body identified. Instead they waited - and are waiting - for some more prey. Rama Rao's friends and comrades realised rather slowly that it was he who had been killed. They put up wall-posters in Kazipet town, offering red salutes to him. That was how his mother Rellamma came to know of his death. She, her daughter-in-law Yadamma, a neighbour called Venkatamma, who is said to have had a boot-legging past and was therefore a woman-of-the-world, and two other women, were taken to the place where the body had been buried by the police after getting the post-mortem done. The date was January 24, fully 12 days after the murder.

It is not clear how the police came to know of this visit. The *Harijans* of Pisara are firmly convinced that their landlords rang up the police and told them. In any case, as the women were returning along a foot-path, they were stopped by four police constables. The boys who were escorting the women ran away. The police beat Venkatamma there itself and took them to a neighbouring village where an SI was waiting in a jeep. The women were bundled into the jeep and taken to Madikonda police station, about 3 kms from Kazipet. They were kept there till night fall and beaten badly. Venkatamma was beaten particularly savagely. The SI wanted to know: "Your caste and their caste are different; why did you come with them?". One week after the incident, Rama Rao's mother

Yellamma still had visible bruises on her body. Venkatamma and Rama Rao's wife Yadamma were made to stand with their hands held up, pressed face-to-face against the wall of the lock-up, and were thrashed with lathis. Later in the night, after the SI left, Yadamma (a young girl, hardly twenty years old) was threatened by a constable that she would be raped by all the policemen present there. The women were shown a photograph of the dead man, but since the face had been disfigured, they could not recognise it. But Yadamma recognised the clothes of the dead man as her husband's. Yet, the police made no attempt to get the identification confirmed by taking the women to the grave. They continued to treat the women with utter contempt. The stinking clothes of the dead man were thrown on Venkatamma's face.

During all this ill-treatment, the police had only one question to ask: who were the boys who had brought the women to the place where the body had been buried? That night they were allowed to go back to Kazipet. Two days later, on Republic day (the people refer to it as 'flag-saluting day') the women were again called to Madikonda police station. But it was neither to confirm the identification nor to hand over the remains of the dead man to his mother and wife, but only to enquire once again: who brought you to that place that day?

EPW, 05.05.1983

‘Telugu’ Encounters

Everything is Telugu in Andhra Pradesh these days. A canal proposed to be constructed to carry water from the Krishna and Penna rivers to Madras city has been named ‘Telugu Ganga’; no matter that the eminent (but not altogether disinterested) irrigation engineer-turned-Congressman KL Rao, has openly doubted the existence of any water at all to be carted to Madras, our southern *Bhageeratha* is hell-bent on digging the canal and demonstrating to the world the legendary (it is alleged) magnanimity of the Telugu nation; when the same gentleman camps at Vijayawada to conduct the first conference of his party, his thatched (but prudently well-furnished) camp house is called Telugu Kuteeram; and there is a threat hanging in the air that the State is going to be renamed Telugu Nadu, to rhyme with Tamil Nadu rather than Uttar Pradesh, in the interest of Dravidian solidarity.

And so it is but fair that murders by the police in the name of ‘encounters’ should hereafter (so long as NTR and his heirs rule) be called ‘Telugu’ encounters. There have been three such murders in the State since NTR came to power, two in Adilabad and one in Warangal.

I

“We are shown photographs of prominent Naxalites, dacoits, etc, and given instructions that if we find them we are to kill them...” So-and-so [he mentions a Naxalite leader] works in the region where the IVth Battalion, to which I belong, is stationed. But our paths have never crossed.

If they had, he would have 'got murdered' by now," - A head constable of AP Special Police, in charge of the police camp at Ratnapur.

Ratnapur is a god-forsaken Gond hamlet of Adilabad district, right on the western border with Maharashtra. It consists of about 30 huts set with surprising neatness in four rows. Though it is only about 30 kms to the west of Adilabad town, it is remarkably inaccessible. There is a motorable *kuccha* road up to half the distance, and then a thickly dust-laden (in summer) cart-track up to Kosai, beyond which at Umri the track runs into a hill whose sides are covered by forest, and which is too steep for any cart to climb. Ratnapur is at the top of this hill, so inaccessible that, according to our head constable, "nobody comes here expecting the Naxalites", and following them the police, of course.

The district gazetteer of Adilabad claims that 40 per cent of the land area of the district is covered by forest, but that is part of the comfortable official mythology in which forests are conjured out of denuded waste land by retrospective proclamation. About India as a whole it has been estimated that only a third of the officially declared forest cover is actually forest and that must definitely be true of Adilabad. There is some forest left along the eastern and western borders of the district, but very little in the central part, which saw a mini-rebellion (led by Komaram Bheem) for tribals' rights over forest land as late as 1940. As one travels down the Chadrapur-Hyderabad highway from Wankidi through Asifabad (the centre of the 1940 uprising) to Lakshettipet, one sees very little that can be called a forest proper, except along the slopes of the Manikgarh hills.

The denudation of Adilabad and the dispossession of tribals constitute a pincer which has haunted the Gonds (the

major tribe of Adilabad) for nearly six decades. The forest lands cleared by the Gonds were made over by the Hyderabad state to non-tribal landlords who would not even allow the Gonds to continue as tenants but brought more 'efficient' peasants from outside; the incentive for this dispossession was - and continues to be - the rich black soil of Adilabad which makes cotton cultivation lucrative for the landlord and revenue-spinning for the State. Together with this came the commercialisation and 'protection' of forests, which deprived the tribals of their traditional right over forest land and produce. The effect that 'protection' of forests has on shifting cultivators is well known. The heedless State fences off the land currently under cultivation and declares all the rest 'protected'; and so, when the time comes to leave the current fields fallow and shift to new areas, there is no place to shift to. Thus, either the tribals are forcibly converted into settled cultivators without possessing the technical equipment necessary for it, or they have to fell forests and face repression from the State. This was the contradiction that led to a short uprising in 1940 at Babejhari and Jodeghat near Asifabad.

Today, the average Gond is no longer a shifting cultivator; but it would be wrong to believe that this is because the benevolent State has solved the tribal's problems. Discussing the Indravelli massacre of April 20, 1981, an ITDA official remarked with a superior sneer that all this talk about tribal's land problem is born of ignorance since in Adilabad the average tribal has a 5 or 10 acre holding on which he grows cotton and *jowar* and is not a *jhum* cultivator. There is a large amount of perverse truth in this. Having forced the unprepared tribal into the status of a settled cultivator, and having massacred those who were unwilling to be thus transformed, the government of the Nizam of Hyderabad sanctified this forcible baptism

into civilisation by giving *pattas* to the tribals on a large scale. But since the Gonds were not provided with the technology - irrigation and fertiliser - necessary to consummate the transformation, they could not but seek new land on and off. Without wells, tanks, and credit for fertiliser, depending entirely upon nature for their cultivation, this was inevitable. And the State (both the feudal Hyderabad State and Socialist Republic of India) has, with a prudent benevolence, allowed them to be sporadically given *pattas* for forest land cleared, though only after considerable harassment, and as at of the belief that he was talking to speak of political brokers of various hues. In the spiteful words of a prosperous advocate of Sironcha in Maharashtra (across the Pranahita river from Adilabad), “even if the tribals pull down the tehsil office and plough the foundations, they will get *patta*”. In actual fact, the pseudo-benevolence of the State goes limping after the tribal’s need for fresh land, leaving a gap for bribes, cases, harassment, and as at Indravelli in 1981, a mass-scale massacre.

But let us get back to Ratnapur and our voluble head constable, whose volubility was a misguided consequence of the belief that he was talking to newspapermen. The 30 Gond families of Ratnapur have their 5 or 10 acre plots on the hill, which extends into a plateau on top. There is not a single well on the hill, not even a drinking water well. The only well close by is near Umri, down the hill, but that is used only for drinking water. The head constable complained (this was in the hot days of April) that every day he and his constables had to quarrel with the people to get a bucket of water for a bath; needless to say the policemen invariably win the argument.

On their princely patch of land the Gonds grow cotton and *jowar*, the *jowar* they eat, and the cotton they cart all the way to Adilabad to sell. What do they get for it? “Whatever

the *shabukar* gives”; that is about Rs 350 to 400 per quintal whereas the Gonds believe that they should get at least Rs 500 if growing cotton is to be remunerative. Thus, the tribals are pushed into debt, again to the *shabukars* of Adilabad, who charge anything from 25 to 100 per cent interest. Each family of the hamlet is indebted, with the outstanding debt ranging from Rs 1,000 to 5,000. Sooner or later, after goats, jewellery and cattle are lost, this will lead to appropriation of the debtor’s land, though there may not be any registered transfer; indeed the debtor himself may not have *patta* for the land he has alienated.

It is all these factors that make continuous search for land inevitable for the Gonds, and brought revolutionary politics to the remotest hamlets. One morning, some ‘Naxalite’ activists reached Ratnapur, held a small meeting and talked to the Gonds. They - according to the Gonds - told them to fell the trees of the forest and clear land for themselves. This was not the first time they had come to the village, but it was the first time they got into trouble. The police *patel* of Ratnapur, Chenchuram, is himself a Gond and no better-off than the others. But, his official position had made him a police agent; he got into a quarrel with the activists, and later went down the hill to Umri, picked up the police *patel* of that village (who is also a Gond) and went to Kosai from where he called the police. The police came at 3 O’clock that night. Their prey were sleeping in the open, outside the hamlet, along with some Gond boys of the hamlet. The police opened fire straight away at those asleep. When they got up and tried to run away, the police fired again. This time they hit a Gond youth by name Atram Ashok. He died in the hospital the next day. The police then put out the story that some Naxalites had raided the village and were chased out by the villagers and in the fight the

Naxalites killed Atram Ashok. To buttress the story the district collector went to Ratnapur (an unlikely feat, if there were no guilty conscience involved), gave Rs 1,000 ex-gratia to Ashok's wife (they were married barely eight months prior to his death), and promised the people guns to protect themselves from the Naxalites. There being no takers, a police camp was set up as a substitute.

II

From the forests, hills and black soil of Adilabad to the dusty red plains of Warangal is a long way, especially if one is not a winged animal; Wardhannapet taluka in the eastern part of Warangal is a backward taluka of a backward district. A large number of Lambadas live in this taluka as well as neighbouring Narsampet; their clusters of houses are attached as hamlets to mainly non-tribal villages, with each village usually having a large number of hamlets attached to it. For example, Enugallu has 14 hamlets under it; (and it was in one of these 14 hamlets that the second of NTR's encounters took place, on April 16, 1983). The victim was Mamidala Hari Bhushan; he was a Madiga (Chamar) by caste, in spite of the fancy Sanskrit name. (*Harijans* of Telangana generally have names which are as elemental as their lives; feudal culture would no more allow them to have what it regards as fine names than it would allow them to dress well). But the name was deceptive, for his was an elemental personality, a heroic rebel-figure risen from the masses; he had the untameable militancy that only activists thrown up by the oppressed classes possess.

He belonged to Nallabelli, about 10 kilometres from where he died. There was a landlord in his village who had about 150 acres of land and refused to let go even one acre under land ceilings; in January '82, Hari Bhushan led the landless

of his village to occupy 30 of those surplus acres; he beat up an SI of Police who intervened at the behest of the landlord. He was arrested two months later, confined for a long period at Nekkonda PS and tortured inhumanly. They burnt him on the hip and ankle with a red-hot poker. He carried the marks on him till his death. When he came out on bail, the police made at least two attempts on his life, but he escaped narrowly; and he invited death at their hands by working among the naturally militant Lambadas of the area.

These Lambadas are almost exclusively poor peasants, having about 2 to 3 acres of dry land on which they grow *jowar*, chillies and sometimes groundnut. Most villages in Telangana have tanks for irrigation but tank water does not reach even the poor peasants of the village proper, not to talk about tribals living in attached hamlets. For the last two years the Lambadas of Wardhannapet and Narsampet talukas have been facing severe attacks from arrack contractors, who suspect them of illicit manufacture of arrack. The suspicion is not groundless, for the Lambadas do 'cook' arrack from jaggery. The monopolisation of the arrack contract over large areas by powerful groups of contractors has led to a sharp increase in the price of retail arrack (from about Rs 15 per litre to Rs 25 to 30 per litre), and the poor have no choice but to make their own brew. To prevent this the contractors maintain well-fed gangs of hoodlums who conduct lightning raids on the hamlets, thrash people, abduct men and women, confine them at the arrack contractors' headquarters at Narsampet town, and extract 'fines' from them; the women are made prey to the lust of the hoodlums. Last year, an enquiry revealed, within the space of two months a total of Rs 40,000 were collected in this fashion from just nine hamlets. The Lambadas are obviously incapable of shelling down such huge amounts, and

so most of them have sold goats, sheep, and the year's stock of grain to meet the demand.

It is widely suspected that these arrack contractors and the landlord of his village had a hand in getting Hari Bhushan killed by the police. On April 16, he was sitting in a hut at Chandragiri Tanda, one of the 14 hamlets under Enugallu, talking to some people. There were two women, Huni and Lakshmi, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, waiting outside the hut. They wanted Hari Bhushan to settle some private dispute of theirs. The police came dressed in the guise of frog-catchers, and sent a boy to call their prey out of the hut. He came out, saw them, and started running away. They fired at him and hit him in the leg; as he picked himself up and started running again they closed in on him and finished him off. They then put out the story that there was a fierce exchange of fire in which Hari Bhushan was killed and all the policemen escaped without a scratch on the skin.

The authorities did not stop at that. As soon as the district collector declared an executive magistrate's enquiry, the police arrested the two Lambada women Huni and Lakshmi, and kept them hidden somewhere. A week of going around all the police officers of Warangal was of no avail, and so a *habeas corpus* petition was filed for the women. They were then remanded to jail for almost three weeks on charge of having given shelter to the deceased. The police got a confessional statement (Section 164, *CrPC*) recorded from them, in which they were forced to say, among other things, that they did not witness the killing. The bewildered women probably did not know what was happening to them.

It was only after thus muzzling the only witnesses that the police allowed even the magisterial enquiry (which is a

routine affair, and has never served any purpose) to take place. It was conducted on August 29 and 30 by an RDO at Narsampet town. On 29th the town was filled with police, one jeep continuously circling the bus stand, keeping an eye on who was entering the town. The tehsil office, where the enquiry was held, looked like the front yard of the police headquarters. The CI of police, Narsampet, doubled as attender to the RDO and obligingly ushered into his room those who would like to depose before the enquiry, after first carefully noting down their names and addresses. When this outrage was objected to, the RDO exclaimed with impassable innocence: 'but there are no policemen in my room!' Like the Venetian contemplating the purity of his soul blissfully ignorant of the dirt around, the RDO was unconcerned about the CI eavesdropping at the door and the DSP at the window: for was not his room free of khaki? When the objection was persisted in, he reluctantly condescended to recognise the mundane reality, and promised that it would be remedied the next day. In actual fact, the police strength was doubled the next day. The reason: the DSP feared that the students of the local junior college who had boycotted classes in protest against Hari Bhushan's killing, would bomb the tehsil office and kill the RDO!

III

Maharashtra rewards Adilabad police: ... Sri Rahim, SP of Adilabad, received at Chandrapur on 3rd September the reward [announced by the Maharashtra government] on behalf of the five policemen who braved their lives and participated in the encounter [in which an extremist by name Sudhakar was killed] at Pinnaram village in Chennur taluka of Adilabad district.

- News item in Eenadu, 9.9.83

This is certainly an odd bit of news in these parochial days, with the States quarrelling about river water, electricity, and Reserve Bank loans; were there no brave policemen in Maharashtra that five ‘outsiders’ should be rewarded? But indeed there are. The SP of Gadchiroli district, for example, heroically arrested 13 students in their teens this summer at Sironcha and proclaimed to the world that he had captured much-wanted ‘Naxalwadis’; he has no doubt been suitably rewarded.

Pinnaram, like Ratnapur, is a village on a hill; but it is at the eastern border of Adilabad. The Pranahita, a tributary of the Godavari, separates Adilabad from Maharashtra in the east, with the old Sironcha taluka on the other side; a few miles inside Adilabad district are a low range of hills covered with forest. Pinnaram is a small village (though not as small as Ratnapur) on the hills. It is about 10 kms from Chennur town, and 8 of these 10 kms are a cart-track through the forest, interspersed in this season by streams. As at Ratnapur there is no irrigation except what the rain gods provide, which is however sufficiently plentiful to make paddy the principal cereal crop. The revenue department very picturesquely describes such wet land as ‘*aasman tari*’ (‘*tari*’ means wet land, and ‘*aasman*’ of course, is the sky). The sarpanch, Narayan Singh, and his brother the police *patel* Ransi Singh, are the only substantial landholders in the village, each having about 20 acres of ‘*aasman tari*’. Their community is called Bondili, and they claim to be descendants of Rajput immigrants from Bundelkhand. All the others in the village are toiling peasants of various sizes, or landless labourers. The landless work as daily wage labourers or as farm-servants to the landlords and rich peasants; since there is good grazing in the forest, the government banks give them loans for cattle, and this has encouraged many of them

to become *bataidars* (sharecroppers). The share is fifty-fifty of the produce, but barring the seed, which is also shared fifty-fifty, the sharecropper has to bear all the other expenditure. But there being no irrigation at all, the agricultural season does not last more than three months, and all the three categories of the landless are jobless for nine months in the year. During this period, they live on work provided by the AP Forest Development Corporation (which has teak plantations all along the 36 km road from the mining town of Mancherial to Chennur), and by picking beedi-leaf for the *tendu* contractors. The wages paid to the agricultural labourers are abnormally low, even compared to the plains villages of Adilabad, not to mention the more developed districts to the south.

Pinnaram is one among a string of villages following the banks of the Pranahita - Parepalli, Sirsa, Babbar-Chelka, Raja Ram, etc. The Government of Maharashtra has long alleged that 'extremists' from Andhra are crossing the river and causing trouble in Sironcha; and the Press has dutifully sung the refrain by periodically publishing inspired reports about Naxalites from Andhra crossing the Godavari and its tributaries into Sironcha and Bastar and causing disaffection among the tribals there. It is this orchestrated scare that is behind the recent 'encounter', for the peasant movement in these villages of Chennur taluka has itself been of a temperate character with not a single reported (or even alleged) incident of violence. Indeed, after killing Sudhakar, the police could find no violent colours to paint him with, and had to borrow cases from Maharashtra.

Sudhakar's real name was Palle Kanakaiah; far from being a fire-breathing Naxalite, he was a heart patient with a diseased valve. A disciplined organiser, he had built a peasant movement in these villages around issues like distribution of waste land to the landless; increasing the wages of farm-servants, the share

of the *bataidars*, and the piece-rate paid by the *tendu* contractors for a bundle of beedi-leaves; and the corrupt practices of the forest employees. About 200 acres of waste land was distributed to the landless, the rate for picking beedi-leaf went up from 8 *paisa* to 12 *paisa* per bundle, and the bribe paid to the forest employees for turning a blind eye to goats grazing in the forest was brought down from Rs 15 to Rs 5 per goat per year in one or two villages. And the struggle for higher agricultural wages was about to be taken up this year. Sudhakar had earned the goodwill of all the poor people of the villages, and the grudging respect of the rich. At Pinnaram, a wide cross-section of the people recall with tears in the eyes that they could not swallow a morsel of food the day he was killed.

He was killed by the police on August 30. He had come to the village early that morning and held talks about the struggle for higher wages with the wage-labourers and *bataidars*. At noon, the labourers left for the fields, and Sudhakar and a comrade of his came on to the road that leads from Pinnaram down the hill to Parepalli, two kilometres away. They saw four plainclothes constables walking up the way. Either somebody had informed them or they were on a routine patrol. Sudhakar turned left and ran into the village, while his comrade turned right and escaped into the forest. The policemen chased Sudhakar as he ran past the *barijans'* huts. Most of the able-bodied men and women were in the fields, but one family witnessed the chase. Ponnala Bucchanna, his nearly blind wife, and pregnant daughter Ankamma saw with their very eyes the armed policemen chasing Sudhakar. He went past the *barijans'* huts and into a *jowar* field. The thickly planted eight-foot high *jowar* stalks would make any 'exchange of fire' out of the question'. As a matter of fact, within fifteen feet after entering the fields Sudhakar collapsed: either his diseased heart valve

gave way or he tripped against a *jowar* stalk. The police then caught up with him and shot him dead. Bucchanna's family, as well as the peasants in nearby fields, heard exactly two revolver shots; and according to an inquest witness, there were exactly two wounds on Sudhakar, one on his thigh, and another which had ripped through his belly. There was thus none of the heroic 'encounter' for which the policemen were rewarded by the Maharashtra government. Sudhakar was hunted down and killed like a wild animal.

EPW, 24.09.1983

Agarian Politics by Other Means

They have tried a variety of means, and most of them simultaneously. They got themselves elected to the Assemblies, to fabricate suitably porous land reform legislation, and thereby got rid of some acres of barren land; parallelly, some others surrendered to Sarvodaya leaders with their anti-bureaucratic Bhoodan rhetoric and got rid of some more acres of barren land; others sold their acres to their government to house the temples of India's development. With this, and with irrigation and fertilisers, they ran out of barren acres and so stopped talking about land reforms. The most remarkable change in recent platform rhetoric of our politicians is the marked absence of the land reforms theme. Nobody exemplifies this shift of the centre of gravity of Indian populism away from the land question better than N T Rama Rao. The manifesto of his Telugu Desam Party is a remarkably populist document, written in the most uninhibitedly sonorous prose; it promises many things to many people - mostly abstract things like honour to women and civilisation to the tribals - but the one thing it does not promise anybody is land. This, incidentally, should confound those who believe that NTR represents the 'capitalist' Kammas against the 'feudal' Reddys and Brahmins. The fact of the matter is that over the years land reform has ceased to be a necessary element of the ideology of the ruling classes, and has indeed turned into its opposite; a sufficient amount of horizontal redistribution at the upper levels has taken place, all those whom the system could co-opt have been co-opted

and so any further talk of land reforms has distinctly seditious possibilities.

Not that they were unaware of, or unprepared for, these possibilities earlier. They were quite aware and suitably prepared. The landlords of our country have always believed in Metternich's notorious formulation that 'war is a continuation of politics by other means'; and, as Lenin added, the other means are violent ones. Thus, while agrarian politics was sometimes debated in the Assemblies, at other times it was conducted with guns (both public and private) and more traditional weapons in the countryside. After all, one of the first things Nehru's newly independent army did was to put down the peasants of Telangana and bring the harried landlords back to the villages.

But there is one change that has slowly crystallised over the years, parallelly with the demise of the land reforms rhetoric and the rise of issues like remunerative prices and subsidised inputs. This is a certain objective homogenisation of the rural rich, a change that is vulgarly seen as the rise of the 'rich peasant'. In reality, the agrarian rich are subjectively quite a heterogeneous lot. Some of them are absentee landlords who maintain houses and vocations in towns, and visit villages only at harvest time, if that; the majority of them are mixed absentee and resident landlords who have business and professional vocations in town, but maintain one member of the family or a faithful retainer in the village to look after the farming without actually setting hand to plough. Only a few are of the hard-working rich peasant entrepreneurial type invoked by that description. The actual cultivation is done either by tenants or sharecroppers or annual farm-labourers or daily wage labourers - usually a mixture of all these. They are exploited extra-economically through caste and debt-bondage and through

the exercise of traditional social domination. The surplus they generate is not necessarily nor mostly invested in the village, but much of it goes into the towns (a significant but prudently unmentioned aspect of the ‘exploitation of villages by towns’), while the required investment itself comes through State-financed development projects. This developmental infrastructure has vested in the landlords’ hands a variety of sources of power and patronage, not to mention finance - from rural banks and credit societies to gram panchayats and zilla parishads. This power and patronage meshes neatly with traditional feudal authority over social life. As is well recognised, one of the distinctive characteristics of Indian feudalism was that the State was not only a protector of exploitation but a principal means of extracting the surplus as well. This is exactly the role that the ‘modernising State’ is playing in rural India.

All in all, this class of rural rich is the dominant pole of the peculiar semi-feudal relations spawned by imperialist capital impinging on traditional social relations, intent on commoditising the product without revolutionising the production relations. It is natural that such an unnatural class should be subjectively very heterogeneous, but objectively, there is one thing that has over the years come to hold it together, and that is its price and cost consciousness. It regards effort as a cost and the product as a commodity, together to pump out a surplus. Across the land, this is one class that is rapidly becoming a class-for-itself; and its footprints are visible everywhere as it becomes conscious of its position and strength. And the more conscious it becomes, the more it gathers behind it the genuine rich and middle peasants, to form a formidable army. Thanks to it, urban eyes are now turned towards the countryside. But what the urban eye sees is not reality, but an ‘ideology’, in the pristine Marxist sense of the

term. It sees the harassed and exploited 'village' confronting the exploiting 'town'. What it does not see is that behind the smokescreen of verbiage created by the Sharad Joshi's, it is their very constituents - the agrarian rich - who are carting the wealth of the villages to the towns, to be invested in quite un-rural and un-Bharatiya activities like road contracts, liquor shops, and a son-in-law employed by the satanic GoI. What it also does not see is that these 'farmers' have two faces, one a democratic face that holds up traffic demonstrating *en masse* for remunerative prices or the Agricultural Costs Commission, and the Other, the ugly face of 'atrocities on *harijans*' as our caste-struck Press calls them. A reality that has not yet percolated into the consciousness of observers is that the 'farmers' who rode their tractors behind Sharad Joshi into Chandigarh are merely the other face of the Bhoomi Sena landlords of Bihar. They are part of the same class-for-itself that is taking shape across the land, and the very obvious differences between them are merely an aspect of the subjective heterogeneity of this class-to-be which has much more rapidly become a class-for-itself than a class-in-itself. The truth of this will come out the day Sharad Joshi, who appears to be busy in Punjab these days, catches the Kalka Mail at Chandigarh and buys a ticket to Patna.

The consequence of this for genuine peasant struggle (which can today only mean a poor peasant struggle) is that the enemy it faces is much more formidable than the old type of feudal lords. It is formidable not only because it is numerically larger, organisationally better equipped, and organically placed at the heart rather than the periphery of the Indian economy, but also because it is a *populist* class, a class that can pretend (and is very successfully pretending) to be a democratic class, which ensures that the various political parties

and public opinion can take its side with much more passion and much less inhibition than in the case of the old-type feudals. The Indian agrarian revolution promises to be a very bloody one.

* * *

The Budget Session of the AP Assembly this year was less a Budget Session than a Naxalite session. The principal topic of discussion was Naxalites, and the concern - for a change - cut across the political spectrum, embracing the Congress (I) and the Communists, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM). The government, again for a change, sympathised entirely with the Opposition, though the natural contradictions between the compulsions of being in power and those of being in Opposition led to quite bizarre and humorous paradoxes. For instance, one day the agitated Opposition wanted to discuss the matter of the Gond tribals, who are alleged to have been incited by the Naxalites to the point of flying a foreign flag in an obscure village of Adilabad district; it occurred to none of these people's representatives that to the Gonds, Hyderabad is foreign land and the Tricolour a foreign flag. But to their chagrin the Chief Minister, in a dramatic throw-back to his celluloid days, took off on the melodramatic theme of 'innocent tribals exploited by outsiders', and gave an oration that thrilled even the jaded Press; in this piece of histrionics, he was no doubt aided by his total ignorance of the matter, for the only tribal he knows is the film-studio version, the paradigmatic primitive dressed in beads and bird-feathers. Thus, robbed of what should have been *their* rhetoric, the confused Opposition reacted with pique.

A CPI legislator complained that while the Opposition wanted to discuss the 'Naxalite menace', the Chief Minister

was quite unwarrantedly dragging the tribals' problems into the discussion; and a Congress (I) legislator from Adilabad, hurt in a sensitive spot by the reference to non-tribal outsiders exploiting the tribals, wanted to know "whether only we are exploiting the tribals - how about the Tribal Corporations set up by the government?" In their resentment at NTR's unseemly melodrama, the Communist forgot that he was supposed to be a Communist, and the Congressman forgot that it was his government that set up the Tribal Corporations! But the positive outcome is that together all of them let many cats out of the bag.

But it was not only the Gonds. If the Naxalites were confined to obscure tribals in faraway forests, that would not have worried the legislators very much. What worries them is that the Naxalites have become a force in the plains, particularly the plains of Karimnagar and Warangal districts. And the agricultural labourers are becoming increasingly responsive to their politics, violence and all. That was the reason for the furore, which included a demand for stringent police action to ruthlessly wipe out the Naxalites, for distribution of arms to 'responsible persons' in the villages, and for an in-camera sitting of the Assembly and Council to thrash out the strategy and tactics of dealing with the 'Naxalite menace'. Only the talk of a national government was missing to give it a warlike or civil war-like complexion. It does not seem to have struck anyone as rather humorous that those who profess to regard talk of violence as un-Constitutional, un-Gandhian and even un-Marxian, should plead for the distribution of arms sitting *inside* the Assembly, the living flesh of the Constitution. But what did strike many as rather more than cynical is the virtuous pose of non-violence put on by the most unlikely people. There is not a single political party in our country which does not

employ violence for sectional ends. The BJP and MIM, in their electoral violence that gets turned into communal violence in Hyderabad, were responsible for more than 90 killings during the last one year; the Congress (I) and the CPI (M), in their running warfare in Warangal, killed a total of about 50 followers and cadre of each other during the term of the previous Assembly. And it is these 'paragons of non-violence' who want arms to be distributed to them to fight the Naxalites, whose tally is nowhere near those numbers!

Anyway, the government has been quite alive to its responsibilities, even without prodding from the Opposition. Starting last July, it has gone on a spree setting up armed police camps staffed by AP Special Police (APSP) constables in the villages of Karimnagar, Warangal, Nizamabad, Adilabad and Khammam districts. These camps have now become part of the topography of north Telangana; there were about 80 of them last September, increasing to 100 in January and at present the number has gone beyond 120. About 20 new camps came up in the tribal belt of Adilabad alone during the month of April. And, it must be added, armed police camps in 120 villages effectively means continuous watch on five times that many villages. Finding APSP either insufficient in numbers or efficiency, the State government declared that it would borrow two battalions of CRPF from the Centre. One battalion or part of it came from Orissa and was quickly deployed in the police camps of Warangal district, and in some Karimnagar villages. Within one month of the deployment (on January 10), the CRPF constables beat to death a lambada peasant by name Amru at Borlagudem in the Mahadevpur forest of Karimnagar. Either because of this premature exhibition of their superior efficiency or because of some internecine disagreements within the khaki establishment, the CRPF men

are now back in the barracks and the APSP has taken over. Not to be outdone in efficiency, they too beat to death (on April 12) a peasant, a *Harijan* by name Pothaiah, at Gidda in Nizamabad district.

The arms the Opposition has demanded are in addition to these armed paramilitary men, and in addition to ever-willing policemen of the regular police stations. The landlords are apparently not satisfied with the violent assaults of these police forces on the rural poor. That they are not satisfied was apparent well before the demand for arms, as the landlords of Telangana have been actively organising themselves to fight the Naxalites. They did not wait for legislative sanction before arming themselves; rather, the legislators demand would only provide a legal cover for their murderous activities. But what is curious is that they did not have to form Bhoomi Senas and such like goon squads, like their Bihar counterparts. They have instead, a national party, and that too a party with a 'mean' image ('the only party a decent man can belong to', in Ram Jethmalani's own words), the Bharatiya Janata Party. It has surprised many that the BJP, which has never had much of a following in Telangana, should attract the attention of the landlords in search of a party to fight the Naxalites with; but there is a reason behind the mystery. The Congress (I) and Telugu Desam have charismatic leaders but neither an organisation nor an ideology - exactly the two things required to wage class warfare, while a charismatic leader is enough for getting votes. And the BJP has both. It has organisation in the form of the RSS and the student wing, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP); and it has the right ideology for winning over the middle sections - Hindu Dharma, subtly (and quite illogically) metamorphosed as Patriotism, which is the last refuge of the propertied classes because it is the false

consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie, a class that has so little property that it imagines the whole country as its own and falls in love with it. (It is, as an aside, a good study in the dominance of economic interest over even pride, that the angry young toughs of the sudra landlord families - mostly Reddys and Velamas - have been willing to swallow the indignities of Hindu Dharma and proclaim it as their ideology, if only it will help to convince the middle classes that the rebellious labourers are anti-national rabble intent on dismembering and destroying the Motherland.)

Thus equipped, the landlords are waging their war. The RSS weekly, *Jagriti*, regularly carries front-paged lies and slanders (apparently planted by the police because they tally with police FIRs) about the Naxalite movement. They slander any individual who refuses to co-operate with them in the anti-Naxalite tirade, even if he is not particularly friendly with the Naxalites. He is hounded until he joins the chorus. Anyone alleged to be killed by the Naxalites - even if he was only a goonda - is posthumously canonised into a martyr in the cause of Bharat Mata, and the BJP, in the company of the Congress and the Telugu Desam Party, celebrates his annual *shradhha* with a public meeting that ends in much raving and ranting against the Naxalites. The worst part of it is that they pick on any policeman who is either not sufficiently cruel to the rural poor and the Naxalites, or insists on even-handedly booking cases against the landlords too; they pick on him and spread the calumny that he is a Naxalite front man in the police, an accusation that is calculated to send him scampering in search of his lathi and his revolver to set his record straight. Last December, the ABVP even held a rally at Hyderabad and submitted to the Chief Minister (among other things) a list of police stations whose Inspectors were not cruel enough or

partial enough to satisfy them. One of the reasons for the State governments' decision to borrow the CRPF battalions was the persistent clamour, both by the BJP and the other representatives of the landlords, that lower-level constables are friendly with the Naxalites and so it is necessary to bring in non-Telugu speaking policemen (who will not be able to establish communication with the local people).

They have not stopped with slander and propaganda. Landlords and their sons in the guise of BJP or ABVP go around in jeeps with guns and other weapons and attack Naxalite cadre. They thrash them on the street, throw them into the jeep, and hand them over to the police who repeat the treatment once again and book them in some false case. In colleges, ABVP cadre move around with revolvers and knives and attack pro-Naxalite students and youth, in the full confidence that they are immune from police cases. A Circle Inspector of Police at Warangal frankly confessed to the father of a pro-Naxalite student who was attacked and injured by ABVP boys: "we cannot help you until your son changes his politics". Many such students have had to quit college fearing these murderous attacks.

In this process, the 'patriots' have committed quite a few murders. They murdered three peasants and a student in Karimnagar and a student in Nalgonda. The number of peasants and students whom they have thrashed or stabbed to death is much larger. Scouring the streets in jeeps or in gangs, armed to the teeth, and backed by the police, they threaten to become quite a menace. There was even a controversial case of a girl student of Karimnagar district who was kidnapped and molested; the police blame it on ABVP and ABVP on the police (adding, as is their wont, that the police officer who blamed them is a Naxalite front man). In reality, it was done by a collusion of the two.

All this, of course, goes without mention in the Press and discussion in the Assembly. But when the Naxalites retaliated and killed two of the most notorious of these landlord-patriots turned goondas, the entire State sat up and decried the murder of an advocate (one of them also happened to be an advocate). BJP advocates made tearful speeches in their Bar Associations and got the Courts boycotted in town after town. And that was also when all the people's representatives in the Assembly started demanding arms to 'responsible persons' in the villages, to defend the 'people' against the Naxalites.

The chorus goes on and on, and will no doubt pick up in tone and strength as the landlords get organised on other fronts too. It is not without significance that one of the two BJP men killed by the Naxalites was also a 'peasant' leader, being a district leader of the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh. Not only the BJP, but all the Parliamentary parties are trying to overcome their ingrained habit of regarding mass action as merely the formal inaugural prelude to electioneering, and to lead *morchas* and *rasta roko* programmes and so on. The issues they are focusing on are quite typical of the agrarian causes championed by the landlords (though they concern a much wider section of the rural population): steady supply of power to villages, quick completion of irrigation projects, remunerative prices for cash crops, etc, though till now their attempts to stage mass demonstrations have been flops; they have just lost the habit of mass agitation. But that will no doubt not remain so forever, and as the agrarian rich strengthen their leadership on this front, they will no doubt become much more violent on the anti-labour front. As it is, a typical Press report of the meetings of the BJP or Telugu Desam or Congress (I) leaders begins with an attack on the State (or Central) government for neglecting

the 'farmer' accompanied by specific demands regarding pricing and power supply, and ends with an appeal to ruthlessly crush the 'Naxalite menace'. This is likely to be the theme for the scenario to unfold over the next few years.

EPW, 07.07.1984

Indravelli 1985

The Seventh National Highway, in its run from Hyderabad to Nagpur, leaves the Godavari basin at the commercial town of Nirmal and climbs on to the West-Central highlands of Adilabad by a brisk series of twists and turns picturesquely called Mahbub ghat; and then it has a run of about 50 kms on the plateau before it dips again into the sweltering district headquarters town of Adilabad. If, on the 20th of April this year, you happened to be on this road or in the teak forest flanking it, you would have seen a very odd sight. You would have observed pickets of 4 or 5 reserve constables armed with rifles holding up traffic every now and then and subjecting the passengers of buses, lorries and jeeps to a close scrutiny. They even pull out some people from the buses, and some vehicles are stopped altogether.

The police are on the lookout for people going to Indravelli. On any other day of the year, Indravelli is so typical of a roadside village in a tribal area - with the tribal hutments consigned to the periphery and the road flanked by the houses of Marathi and Telugu settler landowners, of an odd Revenue or Forest or 'Tribal Development' official, and most prominently the big and ugly houses of the Marwari traders with the unmistakable swastika and the best-of-both-worlds motto *shubblaabh* daubed in simulated turmeric (that is to say yellow paint) on the door-post - that you would have wondered why the police should be interested in people going to Indravelli. But 20th of April is not any other day of the year.

Four years ago that day, on 20th of April 1981, the police fired on a large gathering of tribals organised by the Girijana Rythu Coolie Sangham for a public meeting. The meeting was first permitted and then cancelled at the last minute and Section 144 CrPC was promulgated; tribals who could not know of the prohibition and who came walking dozens of miles along forest paths were deliberately assaulted and fired upon. The exact death toll is a matter of dispute. The government maintains that only 13 persons died, and indeed only 12 names have been identified to date; but the local estimate is much higher, and a fact-finding committee of civil liberties people from Delhi and elsewhere, which included among others (and thereby hangs our tale) Manoranjan Mohanty, Professor of Political Science at Delhi University, gave its estimate as sixty.

Since that year, the Sangham has made it a habit to hold a commemoration meeting at Indravelli on that date every year. A memorial monument was built amidst continuous police threats, and confiscation of the building material. On the first anniversary, the police went around and so effectively propagated their threat of ‘one more Indravelli’ that not a single tribal turned up at the commemoration meeting. The second year, when the memorial monument was inaugurated, was better. The police blocked roads, held up buses plying along the route and pulled out anybody who had bought a ticket to Indravelli; as evening came on, they even got the buses cancelled. But the tribals came nevertheless. The third year, the gathering was about 10,000 and was addressed among others by George Fernandes. This steadily increasing success of the commemoration meeting sets half the background to what happened this year.

Growing Strength of Tribal Movement

The other half is the steadily increasing strength of the tribal movement among the Gonds of Adilabad. The Gonds

are a tribe who do not fit the romantic urbanite's notion of an Adivasi. They dress themselves in the manner of the Maratha peasants who have occupied the lands of which the Gonds have been dispossessed. At festival times they probably put on an exotic appearance but on a normal day it is not possible to catch them in anything other than a dhoti and perhaps a full-sleeved shirt. They speak Gondi, Marathi and a smattering of Telugu and Hindi. Shifting cultivation and *mabua* - archetypal themes in journalistic discussions of 'tribal problems' - are no longer issues of much moment with them. Shifting cultivation is confined to the hilly slopes deep inside the forest, and the *mabua* is an occasional tree that stands out in lonely splendour on the deforested plains, splendid by virtue of its closely packed crown and the smell, if you know to recognise it. If you talk to the Gonds today, they are more likely to complain about the small amount the Marwari *seths* of Adilabad pay for the cotton crop. And you will believe their plaint if you visit Adilabad and look at the prosperous Marwaris, and - in the proper season - the heaps of bright white cotton by the roadside, which the people appropriately call 'silver mountains'.

The price of cotton, and land, of course.

Adilabad is a district where the 'village tank', a universal phenomenon and even an institution in the rest of Telangana, is prominently absent. In the typical village of North and West Adilabad, which is the recently deforested area, there are few tanks, few irrigation wells, and no canals, notwithstanding the fact that the district is ringed on three sides by the Godavari and two of its tributaries - the Pranahita and the Penganga. Agriculture depends almost exclusively on rainfall, which increases the land-hunger further. The tribals have been robbed of the best land by the non-tribals and they are therefore continuously in search of new land. The only way they can get

it is to cut down forests. They have always been doing this, ever since the Government of the Nizam of Hyderabad introduced non-tribal settlers into the district and parallelly adopted a forest policy of growing teak. But they have always had to contend with the Forest Department, its corrupt officials, and Court cases. The main advantage they have gained with the formation of the Sangham is that their new-found collective strength deters the corrupt officials from their exactions.

The State, naturally, has never liked this. And it has reacted in the only way it knows: by deploying the police and giving them the licence to do what they please. Indravelli of 1981 was the first attack. In March last year there happened an incident that could easily have been one more Indravelli in miniature, and which was widely publicised in the Press. The setting was a bunch of villages - Satnala, Ibyaguda, Jamini, Mediguda, Mangurla - a few kilometers to the east of Adilabad town. Tribals of this area had occupied about 300 acres of forest land, and 65 acres of land illegally retained by an ex-Makhtedar. And the peasants (both tribal and non-tribal) of Toyaguda, Mangurla and Jamini were agitating for proper compensation for the 1,000 acres of land they would lose under an irrigation project on the Satnala stream. The story of this compensation is a good instance of how every welfare measure in our country is used against the people. The State pays compensation according to what is called the market value of the land: but since this is a notified area where no transfer of land is permitted, the only market value available is that of many years ago, of the time before the notification. Thus, good cotton growing land worth at least Rs 25,000 per acre was paid compensation of only Rs 5,000.

In the early hours of March 10, the police raided these villages in three vans and nine jeeps, and after indiscriminate lathi charge, rounded up 60 to 70 tribals. As they put them in the vans and reached Satnala on the way back, they were surrounded by a large gathering of tribals who had come from various villages to the weekly fair at Satnala. The police lathi-charged them, fired eight rounds into the air, and compounded their catch by arresting another seventy persons. They were all thrashed mercilessly at Adilabad police station and 52 of them (including two women) were charged with assaulting and attempting to murder the police “while they were scouting the forests for a wanted Naxalite”. The Court, in its wisdom, refused some of them bail and they had to spend nearly a month at a distant Nizamabad district jail before they could obtain bail; the others were given bail with the condition that they should stay at far-off towns like Nirmal and Bhainsa, where they would not get even the daily meals that their friends would get in jail.

Another series of assaults that took place in June-July 1984 again illustrate the cycle of proclaimed welfare and developmental measures turning against the people, and then the police being let loose on the people for harbouring Naxalites. In the southern taluka of Khanapur, a major source of supplementary income to the tribals and other poor people is the collection of gum. Now, it is part of the mythology of ‘Tribal Development’ how the greedy private traders buy such forest produce dirt cheap from the tribals (among the more exotic stories being the exchange of a basket of tamarind for a packet of cigarettes), and how the benign State has rescued the tribals by setting up tribal cooperatives and corporations. Very few people know that these cooperatives actually pay them less than the greedy private traders, except that the replacement

of barter of cigarettes and salt against forest produce with cash payment makes it look more civilised. The reason is that the private trader regards the forest produce procured by the tribal as the property of the tribal and pays for its value - though he pays much less than the market value. The institutions of the State pay neither the real market value nor the market value unless there is a nominal profit for the State; they do not in the first place regard the forest produce procured by the tribals as their property at all; the forest and all it contains is the property of the State, and all that the tribal gets is a wage for procuring it, which naturally turns out to be much less than the diminished market value paid by the private trader. Speaking of Adilabad, the tribal gets only Rs five to eight per kg of gum from the tribal cooperative, whereas the private traders pay Rs 12. The 'nationalisation' of forest produce is a bigger fraud on the forest dwellers than the commercialisation of forests that began about a century and a half ago. Its purpose has never been to ensure that the forests provide a decent livelihood to the tribals, but only to take away the forests from the petty marauders and concentrate the wealth in the hands of the State to serve the interest of the principal propertied classes of the country.

The forest-dwellers themselves may not know all this but they do know who pays them more. And so a lot of 'smuggling' takes place, to which the State reacts by setting up police stations and camps, and assaulting the tribals. During June-July 1984 there were repeated raids on Dharmajipet, Kadem, Dathojipet, Gangapuram and Allampalli. A large number of people were beaten, arrested and some of them were released upon payment of Rs 200 each to the SI of Khanapur; houses were pulled down, pots and utensils smashed and limbs broken. A police camp was set up for a period at Allampalli and the policemen forcibly took 20 chickens from the people of Allampalli and three goats from the people of Gangapuram.

‘Free Hand’ for Police

Since March 1985 things have worsened. To NT Rama Rao, his re-election this year has apparently meant that he can behave without regard to anybody’s opinions. He has quickly acted in giving the police the ‘free hand’ that is their fondest fancy, in dealing with the peasant movement. And this brings us to the odd sight you would have seen if you had been on the Seventh National Highway on the 20th of April this year.

The police decided that prohibiting the Indravelli meeting is not the best way of assaulting the tribals. They permitted the meeting, and assaulted the people as they prepared for it. They arrested the organisers, including Ganji Rama Rao, who was for many years a member of the State Assembly before the CPI split. They arrested him at Indravelli three days before the meeting and declared to the Press that he was arrested at far-off Asifabad while extorting donations from traders by threats. They arrested students who were carrying a plaque to be attached to the monument. They drove back tribal groups coming to the meeting by driving jeeps into them. And unlike in the previous year, they arrested even the speakers who had come to address the meeting. One of them was Manoranjan Mohanty, for whom this was to be a return visit to Indravelli where he had come with the fact-finding committee four years ago.

The jeep in which he and some others were traveling was stopped at the village of Gudihathnur where the road to Indravelli branches off from the highway. The jeep was stopped by barricading the road with big stones. Their bags were taken out and the contents thrown out. Where they protested, they were beaten with fists and proclaimed to be ‘under arrest’. The grounds of the arrest was stated to be preventive detention

under Sec 151 CrPC. After they got into the jeep they were further beaten with rifle butts. In this manner they were taken to Adilabad and the eight of them (including the jeep driver, cleaner and a friend of theirs) were thrown into a single lock-up; they were kept there till the next night without being given any food to eat, but were copiously photographed, fingerprinted and interrogated. Mohanty repeatedly requested the SI to let him speak to the Superintendent of Police, for he had an air ticket to Delhi the next day where he had to attend a UGC seminar, and therefore had to get back to Hyderabad before the night. It must be presumed that the SI informed the Superintendent of Police but that gentleman was disinclined to oblige.

To their consternation and surprise the arrested persons discovered late the next night that their detention was not preventive as they had been told all along, but they were being charged (the jeep driver, cleaner and all) with having criminally intimidated the villagers of Gudihathnur by threatening to kill them if they did not go to Indravelli, and further, for good measure, for having incited them to revolt against the police and proceed to Indravelli. It was with great difficulty that they could get bail the next day in the Court of the Munsif Magistrate, Adilabad. The Police Prosecuting Officer pretended to disbelieve Mohanty's claim that he was a Professor at Delhi University, and challenged him to prove it!

A few days later, when some Pressmen asked NT Rama Rao why intellectuals and academics were ill-treated in this manner, he is reported to have replied: "But why should those people encourage such activities?". There is no better epilogue for the shameful episode.

Over to the Police : New Spate of 'Encounter' Killings

The sky is hot, the wind is hot, and the brown barren earth is baked hot; only the bulbul with its black bark and jade green crown stands out against the white heat of May. The dust road meanders through the deserted villages of Vemulawada whose mud walls implore you to 'Vote for Y Kasipati, CPI-ML candidate, on the Spade symbol'. But the houses and streets are so palpably empty that you would be justified in thinking that the ghosts have written the graffiti, if you did not know that the elections were over in March and this was May.

No, not all the people have been driven away by the police. Some have, but the others have a more natural reason for being away. This is summer, and summer is the season for travel. For the landed and the propertied it is the time between the second crop and the next season, and so the time for visiting gods and kinsfolk; it is the season of marriages too, by the almanac of an agrarian society. For the poor and the labouring, it is the time to go out in search of work, for they have saved nothing from the *kharif* and *rabi* seasons and if they don't find work elsewhere then they will starve. Some of them have moved to neighbouring villages to deepen the wells of the landed classes for the summer crop; some have gone farther to the sites of projects and canals; some, the younger, and more enthusiastic among them, have gone all the way to Bombay to work on the power looms of Bhiwandi or in the mills of the city, for there

is a steady emigration from Karimnagar to the city of Shiv Sena. The more reckless among them will travel by the 'semi-luxury' bus run daily between Jagtial and Bombay by the State Road Transport Corporation; and the more prudent of the lot you will find queuing up at Kazipet railway junction buying tickets by the Minar Express to Kalyan or Dadar. You will recognise them easily for they travel in unkempt droves and buy their tickets with soiled wads of notes. Of these youthful *emigres*, the more outrageously ambitious have a further design. They have begged and borrowed a few thousand rupees and they hope that from Bombay they will bribe and buy their way to the Promised Land of Indigent Indians, referred to with varying degrees of inaccuracy as the Arab countries, the Gulf countries, the Oil countries, or just 'Muscat-Dubai' as in Karimnagar. They hope to go there and stay for a couple of years and earn not only their keep but enough extra to buy those three acres of land that will make all the difference between a hand-to-mouth existence and passable comfort. In many cases, the brokers - most of them local landlords - will swindle them of all their money before they leave the shores of Bombay; even if they manage to reach the magic land of Oil, in most cases they will come back with just enough money to settle the high-interest debt contracted for the purpose, the only extra being some outlandish memento like a vacuum-cleaner which the bemused mother or wife back home will preserve as a precious *object d'art*. And the few who do manage to come back with substantial surpluses will discover that the landlords - who are the only ones with land to sell - have inflated the price of land, and the effort has not been worth the candle.

Tadu Rajaiah and Vuppala Lakshmirajam were two such 'ambitious' youth, of Venkatraopet in Vemulawada taluka. Rajaiah was the son of a peasant with two and a half acres of

land and Lakshmirajam's was a landless family that cultivated one and a half acres on lease. The two of them had borrowed money in bits and pieces of a hundred or two from each of a large number of creditors, and had by this means accumulated quite handsome amounts. Lakshmirajam had collected Rs 12,000 and Rajaiah Rs 25,000. That poor peasants could raise such amounts is an indication of how profitable the business of lending money to Muscat-Dubai ventures is. But it is one thing to get money and quite another to get a job and a passport. For this, they had been hanging around their brokers in Bombay for the last three years and had perhaps spent much of their money.

At the beginning of this summer they got letters from home asking them to come back and help in harvesting the crop. Rajaiah came back on the March 10, and Lakshmirajam on the April 6. They were both killed by the police on the night of April 10, along with three others.

The police describe the killing as an 'encounter'. According to Sharif, CI of Police of Vemulawada (and please listen) on the night of April 10 he came to know of the presence of an armed squad of extremists camping at the boundary of Venkatraopet and Kondapur. He went there with a party of policemen including SI of police Francis of Vemulawada and SI of police Veeraswamy of Gambhirraopet. As they approached, the extremists got up and threw bombs at them. The policemen identified themselves and asked them to please stop throwing bombs. They, however, continued to throw bombs. The policemen again repeated their courteous admonitions. This time the brazen lot threw grenades at them and fired with rifles. Unable to tolerate this impudence any further the policemen took position and fired at the extremists. They went on firing till they felt sure that the threat to their

lives was overcome and then stopped firing and went over to the spot where the extremists had assaulted them from; and lo and behold! All the five naxalites were stone dead. Such marksmanship at 2 am of a moonless night must excite the admiration of the worst critics of the Indian police.

What really happened was much less heroic. That night Rajaiah and Lakshmirajam went to the fields to guard their half harvested crop. In the fields they met three activists, Raghupathi, Sathaiah and Gangaiah. The five of them - and an unidentified sixth person - sat and talked till late in the night. Perhaps they talked of the way the police had ravaged these villages during the last two elections to prevent people from voting for the CPI-ML candidate; perhaps they talked of Sathamma of Samudralingapuram who was raped on the night of January 13 by the policemen of Mustabad and Gambhirraopet police stations; or perhaps - as is most likely - they talked of the swindling brokers who were making piles of money from the Gulf emigration business.

They slept at an open spot on the ridge-like elevation separating Venkatraopet from Kondapur. They were awakened by policemen prodding them on the chest with rifle-butts. The policemen tied their hands behind their backs. They then held a brief consultation and decided to finish them off. They fired at them with sten guns. Lakshmirajam and the unknown sixth person managed to break out and run away. Lakshmirajam was chased and gunned down by the police but the sixth person escaped in a severely wounded condition. It was when he met some reporters of *Indian Express*, *Andhra Prabha* and *Udayam* and revealed the facts to them that the truth came out. It was published widely in the Press, and caused widespread revulsion in the public. But predictably, not only did the police feel no sense of shame, they even had the gumption to summon the

editors of these newspapers to present themselves before the CI of Sirsilla (the officer who issued the summons) and give information about the escaped 'extremist'. The remarkable aspect of the entire episode is that the Chief Minister did not even make face-saving noises - as one would normally expect him to do - at any point of this scandalous affair. Instead, he has maintained a stubborn silence and his Home Minister dismissed it casually as a 'routine affair' unworthy of the fuss the Press was making.

The Beginning

This sensational killing was only the most widely publicised of the 'encounters' committed at the behest of NT Rama Rao's government this year. It was neither the first nor the last. The first took place on January 21 at Pochampalli (under Pambatla gram panchayat) in Jagtial taluka of Karimnagar district. The victim was 35 year old Khairi Gangaram, a person described by the police as a 'terror'. However, there is no record that he was a terror to anybody other than the notorious Velama landlords of Jagtial. Nobody (excepting the police) as yet knows exactly how Gangaram was killed. The police version (as usual) is that he died in a shoot-out, and notwithstanding his reputation as a 'terror', no damage of consequence was done to the police officer who 'encountered' him. The closest one can get to the truth is that he was talking to some people in a house in the village that day at about 11 am, when news came that the police had come to the village scenting his presence. The persons he was talking to left in a hurry, and he bolted himself inside the house. The police officer came to the house and asked him to open the door and come out. He refused, saying that he feared he would be killed. The Inspector is then believed to have climbed on to the roof, pulled off a couple of tiles, and shot down Gangaram. Whether Gangaram

returned fire at the roof, and if so with what material effect, is not known. Those who believe that a police officer would be incapable of such feats may be told that the police of Karimnagar have longstanding expertise in the matter. Over the last couple of years, they must have pulled down the roofs - to the last tile and the last bit of thatching - of at least 200 houses.

The second killing took place on March 28. The locale this time was a tribal (Koya) hamlet of 40 huts by name Veerabhadram in Bhadrachalam taluka of Khammam district. Bhadrachalam is a temple town located on the northern banks of the Godavari.

Northwards from the town, the road goes into a wide expanse of deforested plains populated by forcibly peasantised Koyas and caste-Hindu landholders who have made a lucrative business of growing tobacco. The law, of course, says that the non-tribal landholders should not be there, but they are there nevertheless. Indeed, Bhadrachalam, a very holy place for the Telugu people, should actually not be in existence if the law reflected reality. Every inch of the town (including the temple and the God) is owned by non-tribals, though they may have no papers to show for it. As with the ancient *Dharmasutras* so with the modern law of this country, the dictates reflect more the hopes of the law-makers than any substantial reality; and they are meant to be chanted, not practised.

Arsapalli Venkateswara Rao alias Chandranna was the activist who was killed in this 'encounter'. He appears to have been quite popular with the tribals and the youth of this area. Indeed, after his killing it was the CPI youth (who normally have little love for the Naxalites) who insisted on covering his body with a red flag - but the police would not allow it. Anyway, he was not well for some days before his killing. On March 28

he reached Veerabhadram at about noon, and went to the house of a Koya by name Matta Lakshmaiah. This 'house', properly described, consists of one big hut and one small hut, neither of them possessing even mud walls. Chandranna lay himself down in the smaller of the two huts. He had an appointment there with an excise contractor. The police - acting upon information provided by the contractor - came into the village. They apparently divided into two or more groups and fanned out in search of Chandranna. One group came to Lakshmaiah's house. Seeing them, Chandranna got up and ran. Lakshmaiah's wife Chinnakka says that he had a bag with him but did not take out any weapon from it. The police chased him and fired at him from behind but missed; but about 200 yards from the house another group of policemen coming from the front fired directly at him and killed him instantly. He had one bullet wound in the chest and one in the forehead. Unlike in some other cases, the police did not even claim that any policeman was even injured in this 'encounter'. They merely called in a doctor from Bhadrachalam to do the post-mortem at the spot of killing (the post-mortem is always done at the spot of killing, and never in a properly equipped hospital), then they themselves cremated the dead body (which is again their routine practice), and finally set up an armed police camp in the hamlet to seal it off from the outside world.

May Day

The third was the Venkatrapet killing that we described in the beginning. One would have thought that the shame of it would have stayed the hands of any civilised government; but no. The fourth one took place within twenty days, on the first of May, this time in Nizamabad district. The village is Baswapur, Domakonda taluka, located on the Seventh National Highway, 20 kms short of the taluk town of Kamareddy as

one goes from Hyderabad. The village is to the right of the Highway and the spot of killing in the fields to the left, beyond the metre-gauge railway line that joins Hyderabad to Nizamabad and onwards to Parbhani and Manmad in Maharashtra. Four activists were sitting under a mango tree, and the fifth, a young lad by name Babu of Muthyampet village, had gone to a nearby well to fetch water. Babu had joined the activists only one day before, and was by no means a ‘wanted extremist’ as claimed by the police. The police (an anti-Naxalite squad) came to the spot. The time must have been around 2 o’clock in the afternoon. The police are said to have received information either from the toddy contractor of the village or the sarpanch (who is also the *tendu* contractor); these persons had, at any rate, adequate reason for informing the police, since the struggle in the village had been for the reduction of the price of toddy from one rupee per bottle to 50 *paisa*; and increase in the wages paid for picking *tendu* leaf from 11 *paisa* to 20 *paisa* per bundle of 100 leaves. In any case, the police did come, and a shepherd boy who saw them first called out to the activists to save themselves. Babu lifted his head, saw the police, and ran towards the mango tree. The police fired, hit him in the back, and he fell down near the mango tree. The other activists ran away, but the police chased them and fired at them. One activist, Rajanarsu, fell down. The others turned back, fired at the police, injured a constable in the shoulder, and saved themselves by running away. This, incidentally, is the only ‘encounter’ where a policeman was at least injured.

What happened subsequently is quite macabre. It is not known whether Rajanarsu died immediately, but Babu certainly did not. He was injured in the back but was alive and fully conscious. The police tied his hands behind the back with his own clothes, and called out to two peasants in nearby fields,

who were watching the drama. One of them was Siddaramulu, who was getting the motor of his irrigation well repaired, a hundred metres away; and the other was Pundarikam, who was closer by and had a detailed view of the entire affair. Upon order from the police, Siddaramulu brought water and gave it to Babu, who drank it and started answering the policemen's questions. The policemen then asked Siddaramulu to go and see whether the other injured person, Rajanarsu, was alive or dead. He refused, and was told to make himself scarce. Pundarikam was kept with the police until the inquest, the post-mortem and the cremation were over by the next evening. Only he, when he decides to open up (he refuses to talk to anyone at present) knows how Babu died: Did he slowly bleed to death, or did the police kill him deliberately after interrogating him?

On the night of May 6 there took place, again in Karimnagar district, an 'encounter' comparable in its brazenness with the Venkatraopet killing. The village was Bommireddyapalli, in Sultanabad taluk, about 40 kms towards the Godavari river from Karimnagar town. The victims were Siddaiah, a Naxalite activist, and Panuganti Rajalingu, a 30-year old peasant with three acres of land. Rajalingu was neither a Naxalite, nor even an active associate of the Naxalites. The event that entangled him in the State's widespread net is typical of the medieval way in which Karimnagar has modernised itself during the last decade.

It is not often realised that in feudal societies, thieving - as much as whoring - is an important activity organised by the landlord class. The feudals of Telangana, as late as the 1940s, were famous for organising gangs of thieves to go around looting villages. It served, as far as one can see on the face of it, two purposes; one, to augment the landlords' loot; and two, to keep their private thugs in money and out of mischief when

their services were not needed by the master. It is obviously a remnant of the time when feudatories maintained armies which fought for the king when he needed, and otherwise kept themselves in money by looting the people. With the beginning of the modernisation of Karimnagar, the landlords have started organising a modern version of this activity. They encourage gangs and private thieves to steal the vital parts of agricultural machinery - irrigation motors, tractors, diesel, etc - and sell the loot in shady spare parts shops in Karimnagar or Jagtial town. One major activity of the peasant movement of Karimnagar has been to prevent and expose this organised thieving. Thus, it happened that when somebody stole the belt of Rajalingu's irrigation motor, he reported the matter, not to the police but to the 'party' as they say; 'the party' apparently managed to discover that it had been stolen by somebody from a village by name Pathipaka Narsingapuram; they recovered the belt and Siddaiah went to Bommireddypalli on June 6 to return it to Rajalingu. The latter, out of sheer gratitude, asked Siddaiah to have food with him and sleep in his house. They had food, but it was not clear whether Siddaiah slept in Rajalingu's house or went out and slept somewhere else in the village. According to Chandramma, Rajalingu's wife, who has however been properly terrorised by the police, Siddaiah went out to sleep somewhere else, while she slept in front of the house and her husband by the side of the house. At night the police, led by SI Khaja Mohiuddin of Dharmaram police station, came to the village. They stepped over the sleeping Chandramma and arrested her husband and took him away. "They will keep him till they find Siddaiah" she says - she told herself, for every peasant in Karimnagar who has ever given food to a Naxalite activist knows that he may be picked up any day and kept hostage (and tortured, of course) until the activist is found. But she did not reckon with the possibility that he may be killed. Either with or without the aid of Rajalingu the

police located Siddaiah within a short time. Chandramma pretends that she was fast asleep and therefore ('since a sleeping person is like a dead person', she repeats woodenly) did not know what happened, but at the same time bursts out to say that the police tied both men to a tamarind tree and killed them. And she even points to the tree, which is just about 50 yards behind her house. The next morning, at 8 am, the police came and told Chandramma that her husband had died. After the inquest was over, and the post-mortem was done at the spot of the killing, the police handed over Rajalingu's body to Chandramma (a very rare gesture, apparently prompted by some sedimentary residue of human feeling) and themselves cremated Siddaiah's body near the tamarind tree which was witness to the killing.

Exactly a week later, and this time in Adilabad, there was the next 'encounter'. The day was May 13 and the village Lodvelli in Sirpur taluka. The papers of May 15 carried confused reports of an armed confrontation between the police and Naxalites in which one police officer said two and another said three extremists were killed. The SP of the district clarified a couple of days later that it was only two.

There was cause enough for the confusion. Late in the evening of 13th, a large number of activists entered the village. They went to a hut near a dried up rivulet outside the village. Near the hut there is a *kallam*, the collection spot for *tendu* leaf, where the people bring the *tendu* leaf and the contractor's man (the *kalledar*) collects it. Since the *tendu* season was as yet not over, there were some villagers at the *kallam*. Of the activists, three sat inside the hut, and the rest stood outside, talking to the people. The time must have been about 9 pm. A police party came and shone their torchlight; the activists outside the hut asked them to put it off, upon which the police identified themselves and asked the activists to put up their hands. Those

who were standing outside the hut then ran away. The police first shot blindly with sten guns into the hut, injuring two of the three sitting inside - Puli Madhunaiah and Ankoli Ramesh. They then fruitlessly chased those who had run away, and came back. To be on the safe side they again fired into the hut. The third person inside the hut suddenly emerged and ran out. The police fired at him as he ran, and were not very sure whether they hit him or not. That was the reason why they were not sure whether they had killed two or three.

There is a tail-piece to the story. Releasing their story to the Press, the police said that in addition to the impressive haul of dangerous-looking weapons which they always claim to find with dead Naxalites (though the Naxalites appear to be singularly incapable of using the arms they have accumulated), this time they also found Rs 75,000 in cash. It was learnt later that the activists actually had Rs 2.5 lakh of their Party funds with them. The police, apparently, decided to disclose only Rs 75,000 and keep the rest. This, once again, is not an exceptional gain, for the police - especially in Karimnagar - have made handsome profits out of this business of 'suppressing extremists'. Excise contractors make regular monthly payments to them, and landlords as and when need arises. Another method of making money is to get hold of dozens of poor peasants, put them in lock-up, and demand money for their release. Most of the police inspectors of Karimnagar have made lakhs of rupees in this manner.

Rash of 'Encounters'

In the last week of May there was a sudden rash of encounters. One on the 26th, one on the night of 27th, and one on 28th. The first was at Chinanakkalpet under Dharmapuri police station limits in Jagtial taluka. The victim was G Narayana. The only details known are that Narayana and another activist were conducting an arbitration in the village

at about 1 pm of that day. A police party came, and the people as well as the activists ran away. The police chased them; the other activist ran away but Narayana got killed.

More details have become public regarding the next killing, at Narsapur in Warangal district. Indeed, the police would perhaps wish that so many were not known, for the event has led to a lot of unsavoury publicity for them. The police story is that on the evening of May 27 they came to know that a group of 'underground extremists' were having a meeting at the outskirts of Narsapur. A police party led by the SI of Mulug is said to have gone there and had the usual 'exchange of fire' with the extremists, as a consequence of which two of the latter, Pingli Bhupati Reddy and Kavatam Saraiah, died. The real story is quite different. Firstly, Saraiah was by no means an 'underground extremist' as claimed by the police - he was regularly attending court in the few cases in which he was accused. On the morning of May 27, he came to Warangal town, to the house of his advocate P Prabhakara Reddy. The advocate handed him the keys to his house; and went with his wife to Hyderabad by a mid-day train. Saraiah was alone at the advocate's house till 10 pm in the night. At that time, Bhupati Reddy came there. He told two or three persons he met on the way that he was going to his advocate's house, and his younger brother Raghupati Reddy accompanied him up to the house. He and Saraiah cooked food for themselves, but before they could eat, the police came (at about 10.30 pm) and arrested them. They were taken in a jeep 54 kms to Narsapur, then taken one km further from the village to a spot that could look like a jungle in a smudged photograph, and gunned down. The only reason for the choice of Narsapur appears to be that it is the closest place from Mulug police station (the station that made the catch) which looks somewhat like a forest. The police, for some reason of psychology or propaganda, always

choose a spot that can be described as a forest when they decide to kill a Naxalite after arresting him. Perhaps it gives them a feeling of having been heroic.

The next day they brought a doctor from Mulug to perform the post-mortem on the spot, and after putting the bodies on the funeral pyre, allowed the father of Bhupati Reddy and the wife of Saraiah to have a look at the faces of the dead men before cremating them. Typically, they paid a measly amount to the cremators and the bodies lay there half-burnt for long afterwards.

May 28 saw an 'encounter' at Jagtial that contains the essence of all that is lawless about these killings. The newspapers carried two stories, both supposedly released by the police. According to one version, there was a 'suspicious person' in a house on the outskirts of Jagtial town. The police went there and asked him to come out, whereupon he dashed out and got onto a motor cycle and rode away. But even as he rode he turned back and fired upon the police (in the manner of some *Puranic* heroes who could shoot arrows backwards), and the police, to save their lives, fired at him and killed him. In the second version, there is no motor cycle but he merely ran and fired back. The police identified the victim as Pavan Kumar, and even claimed that they found upon him a service revolver allegedly stolen from an Inspector by the Naxalites last year at a village by name Gattubuthkur. A couple of days later it transpired that there was some confusion regarding his identity, and exactly a week later the District Magistrate and Collector of Karimnagar announced that there would be a magisterial enquiry into the death at Jagtial of an 'unknown Naxalite'. It does not seem to have struck anybody as quaint that the victim should be identified as a Naxalite even before he could be identified by name. (But stranger things have happened in this State that has lent the term 'encounter' to the

lexicon of State terrorism; in year 1981 there was the death in an ‘encounter’ in Nalgonda district of a person described as “an unknown Naxalite belonging to the Re-Organising Committee of CPI-ML, which is surely a more uncanny performance.)

What really happened that day at Jagtial was this: the victim’s name was Govinda Reddy, and he belonged to Nizamabad. Indeed, he was originally of Chitradurga district in Karnataka and after working and resigning from the Indian Air Force, and later working as a hotel manager at Nizamabad and resigning from that post too, he joined the Naxalites. The police would find it terribly embarrassing to connect him with the revolver-snatching incident at Gattubuthkur. He was staying at a house at one end of Jagtial town that morning, and had sent a boy to fetch him cigarettes. The police got suspicious of the boy buying cigarettes and went with him to the house, where they found Govinda Reddy. They caught him, took him out on to the Dharmapuri road, and killed him. It was after killing him that they tried to give him a name, and perhaps by some facial resemblance decided that he must be Pavan Kumar. The Gattubuthkur revolver was added on to lend a touch of ‘investigation’, which has later turned out to be embarrassing.

Conclusion

Somebody is bound to ask why all this is happening. The shortest answer is that NT Rama Rao wants it to happen. It is no accident at all that barring the first of these killings all the rest took place after his resounding victory in the recent Assembly elections. The victory, against the odds set by Bhaskara Rao’s defection and the split in his party, has given him the kind of confidence he needs to indulge in such killings. Indeed, not only the killing of Naxalite activists and their sympathisers, but much worse is apparently in store. The papers

of June 11 carried a news item that the state government would use the Central government's Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, and further (with due regard for democratisation of Centre-State relations) would enact its own Terrorist Act to be used alongside the Central Act. Terrorism is to be defined, as in the Central Act, as an act of violence perpetrated with the intention of terrorising the public or threatening or overawing the State or any public servant, but with the novel definition of 'public servant' to include anybody who aids the police, that is to say the professional informers and stock witnesses whom the police employ the world over in the execution of their duties. In addition, the Act would designate certain organisations as 'front organisations of Naxalites' (this provision is apparently aimed at civil liberties organisations); and it would give the police the power to declare (as and when occasion arises) certain areas in the State as 'prohibited zones' where the designated organisations would not be allowed to enter. The motivation for this peculiar provision is obvious: the police will kill somebody in an 'encounter' and then declare that the area is a prohibited zone for civil liberties organisations, so that nobody can know what really happened in the 'Encounter'.

On the same day that this news item appeared in the papers, a civil liberties delegation led by George Fernandes, general secretary of the Janata Party, met NTR and asked him about the report. He put on the best histrionic performance of his career, and denied all knowledge of the Bill. But a few days later, he told pressmen that he intended to introduce it. One has to wait till the monsoon session of the Assembly to know whether and what shape the Bill will take.

‘Encounters’ and the Supreme Court

The Arwal killing in Bihar has once again focused attention on State sponsored murders of the agrarian poor and their activists. The Director General of Police, Bihar, has said that nobody would be allowed to go around agitating and organising people in the name of non-implementation of Land Reform and Minimum Wages Acts. Such attempts, he said, would be crushed ruthlessly. This fantastic statement, whose underlying presumption is that welfare laws are made by the State and it is the State's business alone whether it chooses to implement them or not, is symptomatic of two basic changes that have taken shape over the last few years. One is that it is no longer felt to be necessary to pretend that agrarian reforms are being implemented; the other is that police officers, instead of merely being used to put down political opponents, are allowed an autonomous domain of functioning, within which they are everything from legislators and political theorists to the dispensers of what they believe to be justice.

It always takes a new personality, a new individual, to reflect a sharp change unambiguously. An old personality which runs into the change in the middle of its life finds its cognition and expression blocked by fear, habit and inertia. No Congress leader to this day has made vocal comments against agrarian reforms but NT Rama Rao can, and does, say that land reforms have been a disaster for the farmer. And his actions echo the Bihar DGP's assertion: agrarian reform legislation being our legislation, merely because we have chosen not to implement

it, you have no cause for agitating and organising people. Such attempts will be suppressed ruthlessly.

It will serve no purpose to yet once more list out the crimes committed by the State in the course of this suppression. But it does serve a useful purpose - in these days when judicial activism is among the most widely hailed social phenomena - to know what the highest court of the land has to say about the matter. The Supreme Court was approached through a writ petition in connection with the 'encounter' killings in Andhra Pradesh. The Court admitted the petition in September 1985, and threw it out in April 1986, with the remarkable piece of advice that the aggrieved parties, if any, should file private complaints with the local *munsif* magistrates against the police. Of all the dubious judgment given by the Supreme Court in recent times this one by Justices Venkataramaiah and Sabyasachi Mukherjee is the most disappointing to put it mildly. Nobody expects the Court to punish the officers who have committed the killings. When the State decides to kill certain people and even goes to the extent of rewarding the killers with substantial amounts of cash (as the AP government is doing) there is no court on earth that can punish them. But, the courts should at least affirm certain basic principles of law, for what they are worth. This applies to all of what is being called social action litigation. But instead, the courts are often taking refuge in administrative technicalities even when they decide to issue a direction to the government. In the matter of police killings, the Supreme Court is acting as an enforcer of the Criminal Procedure Code and not the Constitution. When the Court is approached with a petition that somebody has been killed by the police inside a lockup or in a staged 'encounter', what is important is not that the policemen concerned should be punished; that is anyhow an unlikely eventuality even with the

best of all intentions. It is more important that certain basic principles should be affirmed - as some of them have sporadically been in the past: (a) that if a person dies in police custody, that should be treated *prima facie* as a consequence of torture and therefore a case of murder committed by the police officer in charge of the station; (b) that a policeman who commits a killing in proclaimed self-defence must be prosecuted for murder and should prove the existence of conditions justifying the plea of self-defence, just like any citizen who takes the plea; (c) that when a police officer commits a crime and claims that he did it in the 'execution of his duty' he should be prosecuted for the crime and the burden of proving that it happened in the course of performing his duty should lie on him; and so on. Instead of affirming such principles, the courts are asking the CBI or the State CIDs to enquire into the alleged killing, or the District Magistrate to conduct an enquiry. The first the governments could do, and the second is obligatory under the Criminal Procedure Code anyway. It certainly cannot be that people should go all the way to the Supreme Court to get the Criminal Procedure Code activated. And neither of these is a substitute for immediate arrest and prosecution, which any citizen other than a police officer would face the moment an FIR is registered against him, and which police officers too should be subjected to, if Articles 21 and 14 of the Constitution are to have any meaning. 'Judicial activism' cannot have lasting meaning if it is confined to ordering an occasional release of bonded quarry labourers (who will anyhow get bonded the next day again, since quarrying is the only job they can do, and all quarrying in our country is done with bonded labour). If it is to have lasting worth it should work to build into executive practice the values that everybody says our Constitution cherishes.

To get back to the judgment (if it can be called that) on the Andhra ‘encounters’ petition, it was even more disappointing than the usual direction to some intelligence agency to enquire into the killings. Perhaps a resume of what transpired will make the matter clear. The petition concerned the first nine of the series of ‘encounters’ that started in January 1985. The nine encounters accounted for 17 deaths. (The total number to date is 42.) The petitioners’ interim prayer was that the reports of the executive magistrates concerning these killings should be called for, seen by the Court and shown to the petitioners. The State’s reply was typical. It started with the claim that the magisterial enquiry reports were ‘privileged documents’, and ended with virulent abuse of the petitioners who were called every name from terrorists to opportunists. The State admitted that eight of the nine magisterial enquiry reports had either been received or were being prepared. Regarding the ninth, it said the enquiry was ‘improperly done’ and therefore a *de novo* enquiry had been ordered.

If the Court had had the curiosity to find out what was ‘improper’ about the enquiry, it would have discovered the remarkable coincidence that it was only in this one case that the report went against the police. The incident that formed the subject of this report was an ‘encounter’ in Warangal district in which two young men were killed on the night of May 26, 1985. They were picked up from their advocate’s house in the town, and taken 54 kms in a jeep to the village of Narsapur and killed there. The magisterial enquiry indicted the police sharply. The police reacted by getting the District Collector (who is also the District Magistrate) transferred within one week. They achieved this by filing a slanderous intelligence report against him. But what is noteworthy is that the government felt constrained to accept their report and transfer him.

It was thought that even if he is transferred the report would continue to be operative, and indeed that was the reason for the petitioners' request that the magisterial enquiry reports should be called for and perused by the Supreme Court. However, this optimism had not reckoned with the capacity of our governments to tell any number of lies on oath. In the event, the State government replied that the enquiry had been improperly done because no public notification was given by the District Magistrate.

If, once again, the Court had exhibited some curiosity it would have discovered one more remarkable coincidence, as well as one falsehood. The falsehood relates to the assertion that a public notification is obligatory, which it is not, under sec 176 of *CrPC*, which only says that the relatives of the victims should be informed, as far as practicable. The remarkable coincidence is that it was only in this one case, where a public notification was not given, that witnesses deposed against the police; in the other eight enquiries, where proper public notifications were duly given, there were no witnesses to depose against the police. The reason is that a public notification is in reality a notice to the police; it is a notice that they should abduct the witnesses and surround the place of enquiry on the notified day to prevent any contrary evidence from being recorded. In the case of the Warangal enquiry, a public notification was not given but the victims' relatives were informed and therefore evidence against the police could get recorded. Thus, in protesting primly that a proper public notification was not given, the Devil was first inventing scripture and then quoting it. The Court, unfortunately, was not willing to call the bluff. Instead, it advised the petitioners to read the Criminal Procedure Code.

As a matter of fact, the Director General of Police of AP would have found the advice more useful. When it was alleged by the petitioners that in all the 'encounters' the police were forcing the doctors to conduct the post-mortem examination of the body at the spot of the killing - in the fields, under trees or in the forest, where there could be neither the appropriate facilities nor equipment - the DGP contended in his reply that 'it is always legal and advisable to hold the post-mortem on the spot'. This is entirely contrary to sec 174(3) of *CrPC* which says that the 'police officer should... forward the body, with a view to it being examined, to the nearest Civil Surgeon', except where the setting in of putrefaction is imminent. And a Civil Surgeon is a Civil Surgeon only when he is properly equipped to be one - the term includes the man and his equipment. The Court, unfortunately, had no advice to offer to the DGP.

These are technicalities, however. The main point is that the wife or children of a person killed by the police are never in a position to file criminal complaints and conduct a prosecution against the police. The judges of the Supreme Court are surely not so far divorced from reality as to think otherwise. Secondly, one killing by a policeman is a murder, but a series of killings rewarded by the State are not just multiple murders, they are a policy of the State. The magistrate can do nothing about such a policy, but the Supreme Court is expected to at least try to do something. That is what Article 32 of the Constitution is meant for.

EPW, 24.05.1986

Incarceration of S.A. Rauf

Right to life vs Security of State

Try this riddle: how long can a person be kept in jail without being convicted of any crime?

Forever is the answer, in spite of Article 21, the Supreme Court in *Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India*, in *Sunil Batra vs Delhi Administration*, and all those cases you have read about. The procedure is simple and 'lawful', in a manner of speaking, for all that the intentions are *mala fide* and contrary to all the declarations on Human Rights that India is signatory to. Here is the procedure (patented, as far as I know, by the Andhra police) which I formulate algorithmically keeping the twenty-first century and fourth generation computers in view: first you arrest the person and charge him with any crime you please provided only it is serious enough to delay the granting of bail; if and when the bail is granted you ensure that the guarantors for the bail bond (colloquially called the 'sureties', by a transfer of epithet) are local people (I do not know what our activist judges in the higher courts say about the matter but their subalterns in the lower courts always insist that the sureties must be local, the better to keep track of them, you see); then they are at your mercy, you can pick them up at the court as they come to present themselves before the magistrate.

You have two options now: either you charge them with some crime (for instance, that they came to court armed with explosives to attack the judge) and send them also to jail to

keep their friend company; or you put them in lock-up, thrash them a bit and extract a statement from them alleging that the prisoner's lawyer coerced them criminally to guarantee the bail bond. This has the additional advantage that you can now charge the lawyer also under a few sections of the Indian Penal Code. In either case, the bail order is rendered infructuous.

This cannot go on forever, obviously. The people are a slippery lot, and India being a poor country there are not enough resources to police every single one of them properly and adequately. So, after a while the prisoner will manage to come out on bail. You must be prepared for the eventuality. The best way is to keep a couple of Special Branch CID men posted permanently at the jail, to find out who is coming out on bail each day. When your prey is due to be released, take your jeep along with suitably armed policemen and park the vehicle right at the door-steps of the jail. It is true that jails have their own administration that is supposed to have its principles and procedures, not to mention self-respect. But that makes no difference, for officialdom in our country is reasonable and always willing to ignore the finer sentiments (like prisoner's rights or their own self-respect) in the interests of Security of State, or even mere law and order. So you can pick up your victim as he comes out on bail and stow him away somewhere for a while; you thrash him to a pulp and then again bring him before a Magistrate with the allegation that this man whom the court was gracious enough to release on bail was caught - much to your righteous shock and surprise - committing yet another crime. The best charge to fabricate is that he was found carrying a bag full of explosives. This has many advantages; one, that even normally being charged under the Explosive Substances Act is serious business; two, that in these days when the Indian Penal Code is gradually being

reduced to a single enactment called the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, the charge enables you to book him under this Act; three, there is the marvellous convenience that (unlike in a murder charge, where you have to procure a properly murdered dead body, which can be rather a nuisance) this is a crime without a victim, for it is a crime of intent and not execution. So then, your prey is back in jail, with the extra benefit that this time he will be that much less willing to apply for bail.

Nevertheless - and this is what life's hard experience teaches - no one likes to be in jail permanently; after a while, after the sores have all healed, thoughts of his wife and children - or the Revolution, as the case may be - will drive him to take bail once again. You, of course, apply the same procedure once again, and see that he is back in jail. If he takes bail yet once more, you do this yet once more.

No, this is not an endless cycle, there is Nirvana at the end; a great advantage of this procedure is that if at the end of each cycle the prisoner is both physically and morally beaten down that little bit extra, the State gains an equal advantage; not merely the negative advantage reflected in the prisoner's degradation but the positive advantage that with each case filed against him the prisoner becomes a more and more 'dangerous' person; to continue the Buddhist metaphor, with each cycle the prisoner accumulates demerit and you accumulate merit. At the end of the fourth cycle or so he crosses the line beyond which his freedom is a threat to the Security of State, Public Order and the rest of the ritual chant that has justified all the repressive legislation in India. So, after going through the cycle described above three or four times you have enough material to clamp a National Security Act warrant on him, and you can then breathe free for one full year (two years, if the locale of

this drama has been declared a Terrorist-affected area, like Punjab for instance). Apart from the Human Rights question, to a philosopher it will seem extraordinary that mere words - and that too the ungrammatical sentences scribbled on a series of FIRs by semi-literate policemen - can change material reality, can convert a free citizen into a threat to the Security of State, and thereby a prisoner-without-trial. But then whoever said that words cannot change material reality was obviously a fool - it depends upon who controls the words and what kind of reality one is talking about. When the reality itself is a tissue of fabrications masquerading as truth, even mere gestures can change it. And this epistemological inversion is sanctified by our courts which have repeatedly held - in deciding petitions challenging preventive detention warrants - that mere multiplication of as yet unproved charges is sufficient to make a free citizen a danger to Public Order!

* * *

SA Rauf, once upon a time a talented lawyer of Anantapur, and prominent leader of one of the CPI-ML factions, was arrested by the police at Hyderabad on March 10, 1983. He was charged in three crimes that were committed in Warangal district during 1981, and lodged in the Central Prison at Warangal. This prison, it must be added, is one of the most difficult in the country to get out of - I do not mean break out of, but get out of - by lawful means, with a release order duly issued by a Court of Law. Serving as it does the north Telangana districts which have witnessed a militant struggle of poor peasants over the last decade, the prison has been converted into a test case for the programme outlined above. Indeed the programme was tried out and standardised in this prison. As far as release from this prison is concerned, no Court of Law - not even the Supreme Court of India - has any effective

‘jurisdiction’; it is the police headquarters that has the final say in the matter. There was one boy, a *Harijan*, named Yaqub after a Muslim Pir, who was arrested some time in 1982 on an ‘attempt to murder’ charge for having assaulted a prosperous Reddy landlord of his village. The boy obtained bail in the third week of his detention, but it was one full year later, after passing through the cycle jail-police station-jail three or four times, and getting mercilessly thrashed during each intermission outside jail, that he was finally released, broken and battered in spirit and willing to give an undertaking to the sub-divisional police officer that he would give up his ‘extremist’ politics and settle down with a job. The police officer - to give the devil his due - was kind enough to get him a job; or so one is told.

Rauf, as I said, was charged in three cases. In two of them, he was charged with having entered into a conspiracy to commit murder (both the victims bore the name Narayana Reddy, one of Upparigudem in Mahbubabad taluq and the other of Odedu in Chityal taluq). The third charge, under the Explosive Substances Act, was that while a secret meeting was being conducted by Rauf at some village in Wardhannapet taluq, the police surprised the gathering and they ran away throwing bombs at the police.

So far so good. Without prejudice to the State’s *mala fide* intentions in framing these charges, one may say that its behaviour was proper and lawful. It is a fact of life and law that the State can charge any citizen with any crime whatsoever and incur no loss if the charge is later proved to be far-fetched.

The tricks started once the High Court gave Rauf bail in one case after another. He was released on bail in the three cases on December 4, 1983. The police were waiting with their

jeep parked outside the jail. They picked him up, put him in lock-up, and served a National Security Act warrant on him dated December 5, 1983. The grounds of detention were precisely the three cases in which he was already arrested and just then released on bail. In addition, it was also held that he had egged on his party comrades in jail, as well as those who came to visit him while he was in detention, to commit further crimes, resulting in their actual commission in far off places such as Asifabad and Nellore. This was a rather unusual way of charging a person already in jail with further crimes; the police were to use it effectively again against Rauf.

The detention was challenged in the High Court, with the contention that since the grounds mentioned were crimes in which the detenu was already arrested and was going to be tried, and since the self-same High Court had, in its wisdom (surely not its mercy), given him bail for those cases, they could not be used as grounds of detention to put him in under NSA. The High Court countered the contention with the formulation that a linear cumulation of (even alleged) violations of law and order adds up to a threat to Public Order. Justice Punnayya said: "It is now well settled that where the activities of a person result in the commission of several crimes, his activities should be treated as affecting Public Order (and not just law and order) and therefore he can be detained under 3(2) of NSA". Having well settled the issue thus, he threw out the petition.

In the normal course of things, Rauf would therefore be in jail until December 4, 1984, but not later. Sensing this, the police implicated him as a conspirator in another murder that took place in July 1984, while he was still in jail. He was said to have conspired with persons who came to visit him in the jail. Since it is the duty of the Special Branch OD to listen in to the conversation that any NSA detenu has with visitors, the

government should have simultaneously suspended the local Intelligence men for dereliction of duty, but of course it did no such thing. This outrage on Law upset even the imperturbable Sessions Court of Warangal, and the Court discharged him of the case even before it could be committed for trial.

Meanwhile, efforts were afoot to hasten the trial of one of the murder cases in which Rauf was accused. As he was about to be released on December 4, on December 3, the case came to a dramatic end and not only Rauf but 21 others too were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of one person, Narayana Reddy of Upparigudem.

The penultimate act of the drama started with an appeal by the convicts to the High Court. As the appeal was being heard, there was a strike, or agitation of sorts, at the Warangal Central Prison and Rauf was transferred in punishment to the Central Prison at Visakhapatnam. On April 3, 1986 the High Court acquitted Rauf and 12 others, and since he had already been acquitted of the other two charges, he should have come out a free man. But even before the acquittal order could reach the Visakhapatnam prison, the very day after the judgment in fact, the Warangal police were knocking at the gates of the Central Prison, Visakhapatnam, with a production warrant to produce Rauf at a Court in Warangal and remand him to the Warangal prison, for he was wanted in yet another murder case as a conspirator. He had, they alleged, conspired with visitors to Warangal prison to commit a murder that thereby took place at Regondla in Parkal taluq, sometime in August 1985. And so, Rauf was back behind the walls of the Warangal prison.

The Court gave him bail once again, on May 27, 1986. But the police are now more alert. In the previous cases they

were late in their attempt to prevent the 'sureties' from reaching the court, and in their impotent rage they only succeeded in arresting them after the event; it required a *Habeas Corpus* writ from the High Court to get them out. One of the earlier sureties was a woman of Chalwai, and perhaps feeling delicate about arresting a woman, the police merely broke down the door of her house, smashed up the cooking pots, and abused her roundly. This time they are more alert. They are stalking the corridors of the District Court complex at Warangal, to pick up anybody who might venture there to guarantee Rauf's bail bond.

The prison walls are perhaps smirking, telling themselves we have swallowed up this man forever, no matter that this country is the largest democracy in the world, and this State is ruled by the beacon light of self-styled anti-authoritarian forces and assorted freelance democrats. Heaven forbid their smirk remains the last laugh.

EPW, 19.07.1986

Agrarian Struggles

The last two decades of theoretical research and political practice have led to the realisation that there is nothing in the world as fascinating as the agrarian history and politics of India. The history defies summarisation and the politics defies an easy consummation. Just as many more tons of paper and ink will undoubtedly be expended before we get a clear picture of India's agrarian history, much more struggle, sacrifice and suffering will be undergone before its blood-stained pages reach their *finis*.

AR Desai's compilation, a successor to his '*Peasant Struggles in India*', is an attempt to record and briefly analyse the story of agrarian politics from 1947 to the present. Some of the articles are selected from journals; some are excerpted from books; some are reports, both official and unofficial; and some are written especially for this compilation. The articles are divided into two parts, one containing some theoretical pieces on 'Agrarian India after Independence' and some reports purportedly giving an 'all India' picture of agrarian struggles; and the other consisting of articles giving a 'regional' picture of agrarian struggles. The division is somewhat arbitrary as is the arrangement of the pieces in part two. If they had been arranged in the order of historical evolution of agrarian struggles - or at least in chronological order - the compilation would have made more sense; instead, for instance, the report on the Srikakulam struggle is 9th in the volume whereas the excerpt from Sumanta Banerjee pertaining to the Naxalbari

uprising is placed 23rd. And the volume ends with an out-of-place account of the Kakdwip peasant insurrection from the Tebhaga days. The fact that no article contains the date of its original publication confounds this confused arrangement further. An opinion or even a statement of 'fact' makes no sense unless one knows when it was made; coming from a person of Desai's experience and seriousness of purpose, this carelessness must be considered unfortunate.

I

Theoretical Issues

The editor's General Introduction, his remarks in the separate introductions written to the two parts, his article entitled 'Changing Profile of Rural Society in India', Sumanta Banerjee's (excerpted) chapter entitled 'The Rural Scene' and Gail Omvedt's 'Caste, Agrarian Relations and Agrarian Conflicts' are the wholly theoretical portions of the volume, which set out to conceptualise the social structure of rural India, though practically all the articles contain a certain amount of theorising regarding agrarian relations. The most remarkable thing about this selection is that it completely ignores the protracted debate on 'mode of production in Indian agriculture' that excited many economists in the seventies. While I suspect the exclusion is because the editor's *a priori* theoretical position (which may be broadly described as Trotskyist) forecloses all debate on the question, the omission is nevertheless well-deserved; an equal and related blessing is that Desai has resisted the temptation to treat his readers to yet some more exegesis of the third volume of Lenin's *Collected Works*.

Instead, his analysis of agrarian relations starts with an analysis of the Indian State. The nature and intentions of the State are central to his understanding of the agrarian scene; in

his own words: “I will go on to discuss the changes that have taken place in Indian rural society as a result of the multi-pronged measures adopted by the Central and State governments of the Indian Union to transform agrarian society politically, economically, socio-institutionally and culturally”! This perspective makes his analysis much superior to the ‘mode of production’ debate with its empirical concentration on landholding patterns, and statistics about tenancy, tractors and tube wells. The stark difference between the Tsarist State and the modern Indian State would make any imitation of the method employed by Lenin irrelevant for understanding agrarian relations in India.

Desai’s understanding of the matter starts with the presumption that the Indian State after 1947 set out to consciously develop agriculture along capitalist lines. The abolition of revenue intermediaries and other land reform measures are said to have led to the consolidation of a broader class of rural rich, a class that the State is seen to have deliberately created in order to hasten capitalist development in agriculture. There will be general agreement with his statement that “[land reforms] sliced off a bit of the old land-owning classes, those that owned enormous estates, and incorporated a small upper section of the tenants in the landowning group, thus creating a broader strata of landowners...” This is a succinct statement of the genesis of the rural gentry of independent India; the difficulty is with the concluding clause that “[this class] would actively take interest in developing agriculture on capitalist lines”. There are two separate issues here: one is what the Indian State intended to achieve, and the other is what it actually achieved. It is by no means clear that the two are the same, nor that either of them is the “creation of profit-maximising capitalist

agriculturists". The Indian Constitution is formally, and impeccably, bourgeois. So are most of the institutions of the State. To Desai it follows straight from this that the Indian State deliberately set out to promote capitalism, within and without agriculture. An alternative perspective would be that the Indian State that came into being in 1947-50 inherited the responsibility of holding together a diverse bunch of propertied classes, and of attracting to itself the loyalty of a terribly restive mass of peasantry and workers. It further had to enrich the ruling classes and to create the institutions necessary for this enrichment. There is no logic by which this multiple burden necessarily results in the conscious promotion of capitalist enterprise. We are not living in the eighteenth century. Many of the institutions created by the Indian State are formally, but only formally, bourgeois. The Indian polity is socialist in its ideology, bourgeois in its formal structure, but an assorted *melange* of social relations in its real content. The quickest and easiest way of executing its task was to subordinate itself in a comprador relation to imperialism, encourage not so much entrepreneurial capital as a parasitical capital sponging upon the State (Bureaucrat Capital) and upon imperialism, create an industrial and infrastructural base for the capital to sponge upon, and safeguard the property and dominance of the newly consolidating class or rural rich, while simultaneously modernising the technological means of their exploitation. The resulting configuration of class relations is not exactly the evolution of profit maximising capitalist farmers at one pole and an agrarian proletariat at the other.

How Much differentiation?

Seen thus, the class analysis of rural India provided by Desai leaves many questions unanswered. The premier point of doubt is how much of the differentiation that he (and not

only he) discovers among the rural rich is real and how much is a product of *a priori* theoretical reasoning. In one breathtaking sentence Desai manages to speak of rich farmers, *kulaks*, feudal lords and the rural bourgeoisie; others speak of feudal landlords, capitalist landlords, semi-feudal landlords and *kulaks*. With due respect one is tempted to challenge Desai to walk into any village of his choice and exhibit for our edification individual specimens of these well-defined classes. Does such a differentiation really exist within the microcosm of a village? The *ensemble* of social relations that define the rural rich have not differentiated into distinct classes; all that exists is a variation in the composition from region to region, the variation being determined by soil conditions, irrigation, history and politics. The reason why no across-the-board differentiation has taken place is precisely the comprador and bureaucrat nature of Indian capital. If Indian capital had to depend upon its internal strength and dynamism for its self-expansion it would have been forced to contend with and destroy, or at least totally subsume, the precapitalistic relations. But since it is not so constrained, and since its expansion is provided for by the State and by imperialism, it has never found it necessary to rid itself of precapitalistic qualities. There has not been a single instance of 'profit-maximising capitalist farmers' fighting feudal landholders in the history of post-Independence India. There have only been agitations of all the rural rich for a greater share of the resources the State has borrowed from abroad or generated for itself. All said and done, class is as class does. The poor can be a class-in-themselves without being a class-for-themselves but the rich are so class-conscious that if they are not self-consciously a class, they cannot materially be a class. If the so-called kulaks and capitalist landlords have never fought the (equally so called) feudal landlords then either one of the two classes does not exist (it is the virtue of Gail

Omvedt's position that she takes this stand) or the differentiation that is read into the rural rich is entirely imaginary. The latter has been the stand taken by the CPI-ML movement, which takes the entire rural rich to be one rather heterogeneous class which has not undergone the differentiation inherent in its heterogeneity precisely because Indian capital is comprador and bureaucrat. This is one important meaning of saying that agrarian relations are semi-feudal. It is a caricature of the CPI-ML position to say that they identify an object called 'semi-feudal landlords' and fight that class to the exclusion of other sections of the rural rich. It is necessary to clarify this point since it has become customary for superior intellectuals to sermonise on the supposed theoretical idiocy of the CPI-ML groups while patronisingly patting them on the back for their sacrifice, militancy, etc. (In Desai's introduction to part two he even manages to hold up the Bhojpur struggle, led by the CPI-ML, as an example that disproves the CPI-ML's own alleged strategy of fighting only 'feudal landlords' or overcoming only 'semi-feudal obstacles'!).

It is perhaps necessary to go a little deeper into the matter. Desai is right in putting the State at centre-stage in the drama of agrarian change; he is also right in seeing the centrality in the role assumed by the State in socio-economic transformation. The objection, however, is to his acceptance of formal appearance as real content, which is no better than the CPI's celebrated acceptance of ideology as reality. The real content of the State's role in agrarian change lies not in the promotion of capitalist agriculture but in the overall bureaucratisation of capital, especially agrarian capital. This was paralleled by the spread of the very singular phenomenon of Parliamentary and Panchayat politics of India. The meshing of the two in Panchayat Raj institutions and their role in

development strategies, in cooperative institutions and their role in the sharing of political spoils, within the overall context of State-sponsored and imperialist-supported technological modernisation of the forces of production, has created a situation where the newly consolidated class of rural rich lives in painless harmony amidst a welter of what would otherwise be serious contradictions. This is the rural gentry, the class of landlords against whom the agrarian struggle is directed.

Just as it is impossible to differentiate the rural rich into 'feudal' and 'capitalist' landlords, it is equally impossible to differentiate the rural poor into the capitalistically exploited agricultural proletariat and the feudally exploited landless peasantry. A labourer who works for daily wages this year may need money for whatever purpose next year and get bonded on that account and remain bonded until he repays the loan to the satisfaction of the landlord, with an amount of labour that is in no sense the value-equivalent of the loan amount plus any predetermined interest. Then again he becomes an 'agricultural proletarian' until he gets bonded once again. Now either one declares that it is all capitalism since the product is sold in the market either way, or one preserves one's theoretical sanity by realising that one is searching for a non-existent differentiation.

It is also necessary to deal with the 'rich peasant question' on which again patronising sermons are frequently read out, especially to the CPI-ML groups. Part of the confusion stems from the way the term 'peasant' is used; it is frequently used as indiscriminatingly as the Mughal and British revenue administrators used the terms *raiyyat* or *ryot*. If the term is restricted to landholders who actually involve themselves in cultivation, set hand to plough so to say, then there is no question of the rich peasantry *as a class* being the principal

target of agrarian struggle. Any such understanding would be suicidal. But even so, the question of unity between labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants and at least one section of the rich peasants remains problematic. It is not the principle of unity that is objectionable but the vantage point from which one desires it. One can seek the unity from the standpoint of the rich peasantry or from the standpoint of the poor.

This is the essence of the difference between the CPI and CPI (M) on the one hand and the CPI-ML groups on the other. When the CPI (M) accuses the Naxalites of setting 'labourers against peasants', or even (as happened in Khammam district of Andhra recently) goes to the shameful extent of conducting meetings denouncing some foreign-funded voluntary agencies which are filing cases against the middle and rich peasants under the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act for maintaining annual farm labourers in some degree of bondage, the nature of the 'peasant unity' the party seeks is clear. The dilemma of that party in this respect is well brought out by N Krishnaji's discussion of the CPI (M)'s strategies (Chapter 16).

Putting it this way makes it appear simple, but to seek unity from the standpoint of the poor - especially when the 'caste question' intervenes - can be painfully difficult. The unity is to be sought, not by sacrificing and weakening the interests of the landless but precisely by strengthening their position and class unity to such an extent that the middle and rich peasantry see no future for themselves except in a - howsoever unwilling - class alliance with them. The difficulty of realising such a strength is one of the principal problems facing the CPI-ML groups today, and the intractability of the problem is one of the reasons for the brutal repression they are facing. But it is a real problem that has got to be faced frontally and

cannot be wished away by pretending that the Naxalite groups are so stupid they do not themselves know what they are doing, a presumption that both Desai and Gail Omvedt are guilty of.

Historical Dimension

If Desai's theoretical standpoint throws much light on the agrarian question by putting the State at the centre of analysis, Gail Omvedt supplies another important dimension missing from usual discussions on the 'mode of production' question. That is the historical dimension. Lenin's analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia starts with pre-capitalist Russia as its point of departure; our economists' analysis starts with Lenin as the point of departure. And when history is thus thrown out caste also goes out with it. I suspect that it is the reluctance (universal among our intellectuals) to look caste in the face that impels them to ignore history. A peculiar caste-blindness affects Indian intellectuals, especially the Marxists, who will even pretend they have no caste if you allow them to. When an Indian Marxist (like any other Indian) meets a new acquaintance the first thing he does is to guess his caste from his name, his surname, his bearing, his mannerisms and his language; but in public he primly pretends that caste does not exist. This unreal attitude has resulted in a most ahistorical social science, which is a pity since India has nothing if not a history. There is no other country in the world which has as much history as India - not merely in the sense that many things happened here in the past, but in the sense of *living* history, the unbroken continuity of the precipitation of the past. The only Indian Marxist to realise this was the great DD Kosambi, and it is no accident that caste occupies a central position in his analysis of Indian history, nor that his analysis has a distinctly Indian texture. Even when you disagree with Kosambi you know it is India and Indian society he is talking

about, whereas with most of our Marxist social scientists, even when you are in full agreement with them you are not very sure which country they are talking about - they could as well be talking about Afghanistan as of India. Unfortunately, Kosambi's legacy has been given a silent burial by his own professed admirers.

It has therefore - and quite paradoxically - been left to foreigners (the prevalent climate forces me to hasten and add that I do not use the word pejoratively) like Daniel Thorner and Gail Omvedt to supply a historical and specifically *Indian* perspective to the analysis of agrarian relations. It is not merely a question of throwing in caste as one more 'variable', but the historical study of the evolution of agrarian relations, and the location of agrarian struggles within this evolution. Gail Omvedt's article 'Caste, Agrarian Relations and Agrarian Conflicts' is a good example of what such a study could be like.

However, her contention that upper caste feudal landholders (*maliks*) have been replaced by middle caste capitalist farmers (*kisans*); and that the anti-feudal conflict of the middle caste tenants against upper caste landlords has been replaced by the anti-capitalist struggle of the Dalit poor (*mazdoors*) against the *kisans* - for all its enchanting simplicity - merely underlines the inadequacy of our understanding of agrarian history, and of caste as a part of it. Notwithstanding the uncommon unanimity among social scientists in the use of the expression 'middle caste', I have never been able to understand what it means: middle of *what*? If it is the *Chaturvarnya* of the Brahmins then (apart from the arithmetic difficulty that the number four has no middle) it is firstly irrelevant to agrarian analysis, and secondly makes nonsense of nonsense. The *Yajurvedic Chaturvarnya* died a natural death

2000 years ago with the birth of the 'self-sufficient' village economy, and feudal society with this village at the base. The elaborate caste (what North Indians call *jati*) system that developed subsequently had little relation to the *Chaturvarnya*; there have been no Kshatriyas properly speaking in the feudal period (but only pretenders); the Vaisyas ceased to be cultivators and became traders; and the term Sudra ceased to refer to a real class as in the past but became a juridical-ideological expression and a term of Brahmanical abuse; the Brahmin, the lynchpin of the system, was the only element of continuity from the pre-feudal *Chaturvarnya* to feudal caste; it was only his celebrated incapacity to let go of anything howsoever dead that kept the *Chaturvarnya* alive, and it required all the sophistry of Manu with his theory of *Varna-Sankara* to keep the pretence of continuity. Now our rural sociologists want to dissect this mummy to discover something called a 'middle caste'!

It is not just a matter of terminology, however. What do (I quote from Gail Omvedt) 'Jats, Kurmis, Yadavs, Ahirs, Marathas, Reddys, Kammas, etc', (without prejudice to whoever else is included in that, etcetera) have in common? Or (I now quote from Desai) 'Marathas, Patidars, Jats, Ahirs, Kunbis, Bhumihars, Reddys, Nairs, Vokkaligas' for that matter? There have been not only cultivators but also kings, feudatories, barons, overlords and revenue intermediaries among the Reddys, Nairs, Marathas and Jats; the Bhumihars, far from being a 'middle caste', have Brahmin pretensions; the Ahirs and the Yadavs are yet to fully consummate their transition from a pastoral community to a cultivating caste; the Kammas are predominantly cultivators but for the last hundred years their ranks have always included a segment of overlords. These castes have nothing real in common, but a theory which says that they are all 'middle caste' cultivators who were once upon a

time tenants of 'twice-born' upper caste (Brahmin, Kshatriya) landlords; that they took the lead in anti-feudal struggles; and have now become capitalist, profit-maximising *kisans* exploiting low caste and Dalit labour. This neat theory appears to be an uncritical extrapolation from the reality of certain parts of UP and Maharashtra (in admitting this much I am accepting at face value the assertions of Gail Omvedt, and of Rajendra Singh writing on the land grab movement of parts of East UP). In truth the correspondence between ritual *varna* hierarchy and caste, and between caste and class, has never been so simple, nor are all castes internally so homogeneous or so homogeneous with respect to the political economy that class relations can be discussed exclusively in terms of caste relations. Indeed, in many parts of the country, to identify the medieval rural communities with either the *varna* hierarchy or with today's castes would be very difficult. It is a mistake to believe that today's castes have always been there; many of them have evolved as castes or caste complexes through the transformation and crystallisation of diverse communities. The misleading permanence of the spurious *Chaturvarnya* is here attributed to the continuously emerging and evolving phenomenon of caste.

To speak of Andhra, where there are no Kshatriyas (except the self-anointed Rajus of the north-coastal districts), and the Vaisyas have never held much land, the class of feudal landholders did not consist exclusively or even principally of 'twice-born' castes but included along with the Brahmins many non-Brahmin communities which are not always easy to identify with today's castes but whose descendants count themselves today among the Reddys, Kammas and Velamas. Certainly, in the British and Asaf Jahi territories of 19th and early 20th centuries, it was landlords of these communities who

constituted along with the Brahmins the bulk of the feudal gentry. The anti-feudal peasant revolts were aimed as much against these landlords as against the Brahmin *srotrijam* and *agraharam* holders; and often people of the same caste were ranged on either side of the struggle: Kamma cultivators against Kamma zamindars in parts of coastal Andhra, and Reddy cultivators against Reddy Deshmukhs in Telangana. This duality continues to this day, so that the Reddys for instance count among their numbers haughty feudal types who would not deign to touch a plough, as well as hard working small cultivators. Which of these are the middle caste capitalist *kisans* we are asked to discover in rural India?

Let us leave our collective ignorance at that.

II

Agrarian Struggles

There are about 20 articles and reports in the volume dealing with agrarian struggles in various parts of the country. The selection can be described as eclectic or catholic according to one's prejudices. Since this is no time for being sectarian, let us agree to call it catholic. There is an impartial selection from struggles led by the CPI, CPI (M), CPI- ML, the Socialists, and various organisations like Shetkari Sanghatana, etc. And at least one article, Jan Breman's piece entitled 'Mobilisation of Landless Labourers: Halpatis of South Gujarat' takes its place in the volume as the dialectical opposite of the volume's theme; it is not a report on an agrarian struggle but on how agrarian struggles are stifled by organisations floated by the ruling classes, for it deals with the immobilisation of landless labourers by Gandhian politics. If the inclusion of this article testifies to the editor's dialectical understanding of history, then the inclusion of a report on Naga and Mizo struggles, which

have nothing agrarian about them in an empiricist sense, indicates that he understands his theme politically and not merely sociologically. For India's agrarian revolution, however one understands and conceptualises it, cannot be complete without meeting the nationality aspirations of the people of the North-East. And it would be a piece of gratuitous presumption to compliment Desai on distancing himself from the mechanical understanding of the two major Communist parties which view all nationality struggles primarily in terms of India's unity, integrity, and 'foreign conspiracies'.

But it is precisely because of the editor's evidently dialectical and political understanding of the theme that one feels a little let down by the end product. Not all the contributors he has chosen are motivated by a like spirit; a few of them are even quite snootily distrustful of politics even as they are excited by mass struggles. Swasti Mitter, for instance, while writing about the CPI(M)-led peasant struggle of Sonarpur (Chapter 24) manages to say that she did her field trip in search of ordinary peasants who had joined the movement not because of 'political indoctrination' but out of a desire to 'seek redress against social injustice' and to obtain 'some immediate gain'. This separation of politics (seen pejoratively as something that is indoctrinated, injected into the people from above and outside) from their desire for social justice and material gain, which is sometimes elevated to the status of a theory of historiography, offends the spirit of the editor's introductions. It is no doubt very exciting to uncover what the masses themselves think of their struggles, but if one is interested more in changing the world than in interpreting it, one cannot but give central importance to politics, and one cannot but view politics as a concentrated expression of the economic and social desires of the people, rather than as

something injected externally into them. The question would still remain whether a given politics really expresses the desires but then that it is a matter for concrete analysis, not prejudiced pronouncements.

A similar contribution is the somewhat misleadingly titled article 'Agrarian Dimensions of Tribal Movements' by K S Singh, an ex-director of the Anthropological Survey of India, whose argument actually is that whereas in Left-led movements the peasants fought for agrarian issues, the tribal struggles had a more than agrarian dimension; that there was no real tribal participation in Left-led tribal movements; and as usual that the Naxalites who led tribal movements did not know what they were talking about. (The universality of the belief that the CPI-ML groups are stupid is quite remarkable. It stretches all the way from bureaucrat-intellectuals to activist-intellectuals and intellectual-bureaucrats. It no doubt has something to do with the fact that the ML groups have confined themselves largely to the poorest of the poor whose inarticulacy is axiomatic to urban intellectuals.) Singh's conclusions contrast rather sharply with the detailed accounts of Tarun Kumar Banerjee on the Srikakulam Movement (Chapter 9) and Sumanta Banerjee on the Naxalbari uprising (Chapter 23).

The contention is not that such a viewpoint is worthless and therefore should not have been included in the collection. Viewpoint apart, these articles are quite interesting and informative in details; even when they do not inform you about the purported subject they inform you about the writer, which is an equally valuable thing. Every writer is a member of a socially defined *genus*, and the taxonomy of intellectuals is as necessary for social and historical studies as that of animals is for Zoology. But if Desai believes, as I have no doubt he believes, that it is more important to change the world than to

interpret it, and anyway that you can properly interpret the world only in the course of changing it, then I believe he should have, and could have, chosen a more apposite selection of articles.

Such a selection, if necessary with more analytical introductions to the two parts, would have revealed not merely some kind of a cross-sectional picture of agrarian struggles but a dynamic and let us say a historical picture, for which one has to now search painstakingly through the volume.

What is the picture that emerges?

The period covered by the volume can be divided provisionally into two parts. One possible classification is the pre-Naxalbari and post-Naxalbari periods; or, less provocatively, the period prior to the drought years of the mid-sixties and the subsequent period. The National Labour Institute's report (Chapter 10) on post-Independence peasant movements in Andhra divides the period into the pre-and post-Green Revolution parts. This understanding would perhaps find approval with most of our social scientists. But, as I will argue below, the severe drought of the mid-sixties and the reverberations of the unfinished business of the 1964 split in the CPI (and perhaps even the Chinese Cultural Revolution) had much more to do with the change in the nature of agrarian struggles than the 'Green Revolution'.

The first period is characterised by the low level of agrarian struggles, lack of political direction to these struggles, the landed-peasant rather than landless-labourer character of the struggles, etc. It is quite striking that there is only *one* article in the entire collection that has anything sizable to say about 'agrarian struggles' in the first period: this is the NLI report on Andhra mentioned above; and its compilation of 'agrarian

struggles' is rather laboured. Three others who make an attempt, N Krishnaji for Kerala (Chapter 16), BD Talib for Punjab (Chapter 20) and Gopal Iyer and Vidyasagar for Tamil Nadu (Chapter 21), discover that they have nothing much to report on the first period, and fill up the space with a discussion of land reform acts and the topography of the land.

All the agrarian struggles proper belong to the second period; and this would in no way be altered if Desai had not decided (quite properly) to exclude the agitations of the better-off landholders for remunerative prices and subsidised inputs. Sharad Joshi also belongs to the second period, and not the first.

The Upsurge and its Roots

What is the reason for this sharp change? It has been customary to regard the Green Revolution as the cause of the change as well as the demarcating line. This opinion is uncritically accepted since it fits in with the thesis of growth of capitalist agriculture promoted especially by the Green Revolution technology, and resulting in heightened tensions in villages. I suspect it also fits in with a vulgar understanding of historical materialism in which tractors and tube-wells belong to the 'objective conditions' but conscious human practice does not. In any case, the understanding does not fit in with facts: Naxalbari, Srikakulam, Dhanbad, Dhulia and Warli, the areas of tribal-peasant struggles reported in the volume were not - and to this day are not - Green Revolution areas. The same is true of Purnea and Madhubani, Bihar, whose *bataidari* struggles are graphically described with a wealth of historical detail by Nirmal Sengupta and his colleagues (Chapters 12 and 13). Bhojpur had its IADP development but that dates back to the year 1960 and is not a specifically Green Revolution phenomenon. (Manju Kala, R N Maharaj and

Kalyan Mukherjee, Chapter II.) Neither the Socialist parties' land grab (report from *Mankind*, Chapter 4) nor the CPI's land grab (Chapter 6, by Giriprasad - Guruprasad is surely a misprint?) took place in Green Revolution areas. Other than the Punjab, the only Green Revolution area reported in this volume is Tanjavur district of Tamil Nadu (Chapter 21 by Gopal Iyer and Vidyasagar) but the agrarian struggle of Tanjavur has had a long history predating the Green Revolution.

The real reasons for the upsurge after the mid-sixties are much more complex, but they can be gleaned from a careful reading of the reports included in this volume. In Naxalbari, Srikakulam and Bhojpur it was plainly a political decision, inspired by the disenchantment with what was perceived as the CPI(M)'s unwillingness to thoroughly consummate the 1964 split, as well as the heroic call of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Sumanta Banerjee, Chapter 23); with the *bataidars* of Purnea and Madhubani, as described by Nirmal Sengupta and others, it was the realisation of the fraud played in the name of land reforms, coupled with the famine-like conditions of the mid-sixties. In tribal Bihar, it was the culmination of a long history of land alienation and usurious exploitation brought to a pitch by drought, and shaped into an organised political form by leaders like AK Roy, with whom again it was a political decision born of disillusionment with the CPI and CPI (M) to organise the rural poor militantly. These three elements - conscious political decision, severe drought, and the popular realisation of the worthless character of agrarian reform legislation - are behind all the agrarian struggles that broke out from 1967 onwards. It is a different matter if it is argued that the immiseration of the rural poor and the strengthening of the rural rich which came about as a consequence of the entire strategy of agrarian development

formed the backdrop against which drought and the radicalisation of Left politics worked themselves out.

The upsurge had many consequences, some inspiring and some amusing. One was the pseudo-radicalisation of the old Left - especially the CPI and the Socialists, who hurriedly organised land-grab movements in many parts of the country. This unaccustomed activity, like an epileptic fit, left them exhausted at the end of one season. They had not an inkling what to do after some land was grabbed. CPI's Giriprasad ends his report, enthusiastically titled 'The Great Land Struggle', with the statement that 'the most significant achievement of the land struggle was the appointment of the Central Land Reform Committee by the Central government'. The proud proclamation is not so much a conclusion as an epitaph.

A fresh bout of land reforms was itself among the consequences of the upsurge. Ceilings were sharply lowered (at any rate on paper) in many States, and most of the surplus land that has at all been taken possession of was taken in this period. Another consequence was the shift of political focus to the landless and poor peasants, who had contributed most of the militancy to the upsurge. Desai, whose theory was all along waiting for someone to recognise and organise the 'agricultural proletariat', is so touched when the CPI forms the Bharatiya Khet Mazdur Union (BKMU) that he readily compliments that party on being the first to recognise the separate existence of and organise the landless labourers. He certainly knows better. The formation of BKMU was a genuflection to those heady times. That organisation has never led any systematic struggles for land redistribution or implementation of minimum wages legislation, unless one counts election time agitational activity. In villages where both the labourers' union and the same party's farmers union exist,

the former is subordinate to the latter. It is only where the farmers are aligned with the Congress (and again only when the CPI is not at the moment pro-Congress) that the CPI's labourers' union exhibits some militancy. And where the farmers are pro-CPI and the labourers are organised by the CPI-ML groups, the environment is one of hostile confrontation. The same is true of the CPI (M), which has exhibited such hostility even towards foreign-funded voluntary organisations organising landless labourers. (I hold no brief for these foreign-funded organisations, and I believe that whatever the intentions of the people working for them they will ultimately do more harm than good to the people of our country, but it must be recognised that this confrontation is one of the reasons why the CPI (M) is mounting a campaign against foreign-funded and denominational voluntary organisations).

But, apart from these tangential by-products thrown up centrifugally by the upsurge, what happens to the upsurge itself? Militancy is only militancy, and not politics all by itself. And it is evidence of a heart in the right place that one is inspired by the coming to the fore of the struggles of the wretched of this land, the agricultural labourers and tribals. But meaningful politics requires something more than a heart in the right place.

It is, I think, a major failing of Desai's commendable effort that it provides no answer to this question. The reason is that the compilation really ends with the Emergency years, though some of the articles and reports have a long tail stretching into the 1980s. The story of agrarian struggle in post-Independence India really divides itself into three periods, not two. The first is up to the mid-sixties when there were no struggles worth the name; the second is the period from the

mid-sixties to the lifting of the Emergency, during which there were widespread struggles but which were either spontaneous or when organised were hesitantly finding their feet; and the third is the post-Emergency period during which the organised struggles reached greater extent, sophistication and understanding, faced a rapidly altering situation, and were rewarded with a mixed bag of consequences in the confrontation. Bihar and Andhra Pradesh have been the major theatres of the discovery of solutions to old problems and the existence of a bunch of new problems. It is sad that post-Emergency Bihar and Andhra find no place in the volume. Since the editor can be accused neither of hostility nor ignorance one is nonplussed at the omission. Not much material, it is true, is available in English to give a comprehensive account of these struggles but enough is available to give a glimpse. The pages of this journal (*Economic and Political Weekly*) themselves have carried many reports; and the booklet issued by 'People for a New India' from which Desai has borrowed the piece on Naga and Mizo struggles, also contains material on post-Emergency Karimnagar, the theatre of one of the most widespread agrarian struggles in recent times. And Desai, who has long taken active interest in the Civil Liberties Movement, has in his possession many reports of civil rights teams on Andhra and Bihar. Perhaps then the omission is because even as Desai believes that the CPI-ML groups have 'elevated the movements of the rural poor from being bogged down in pure economism and reformism to a new heightened political level' his theoretical and political prejudices blind him to the crucial strategic and tactical lessons learnt by them, which has taken the 'heightened political level' one step higher. The contention is not that the Naxalite groups alone are in search of the path that will put an end to the long history of blood and pain that defines agrarian India; many others - from

doubting Marxists to dissident Jesuits - are also seeking, but there can be no comparison between the two in terms of political significance. This is where Desai's catholicity begins paying diminishing returns.

It is impossible to end the review without paying a heartfelt compliment to the editor's undying spirit, which appears to be immune to all the demoralising pressures of our age of despondency in politics and pedantry in thought. The best tribute one can pay is to hope that he will be around long enough to edit one more volume, this one on agrarian struggles in the post-Emergency period.

(Review of 'Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence' edited by A R Desai; Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1986; pp xxvi + 666, Rs 250.)

EPW, 09.08.1986

‘Encounter’ Killings : Aftermath of Supreme Court Judgement

At Arwal they killed them inside the compound of a library built in memory of Mahatma Gandhi. The abode of the Creator’s consort named after the most recent prophet of *abimsa* is a macabre place to take human lives in. In Andhra, they used to kill them in faraway forests or at least in the *banjars* of anonymous villages. Now they have started killing them inside populous towns, within the hearing of hundreds of people. They are killing them in high school grounds, in deserted temples, and on the bunds of tanks and canals.

After the Supreme Court dismissed Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee’s (APCLC) petition on ‘encounter’ killings, there has been a perceptible increase, if not in the rate of killings (for that depends also upon how alert the prey are) then certainly in the brazenness of the killings. In May last year the Warangal police picked up two young men, Bhupati Reddy and Saraiah, sleeping at their advocate’s house in the heart of Warangal town. With every intention of killing them, they nevertheless took them in a jeep far enough to reach the outer fringes of the Godavari Valley forest, 54 kms from Warangal to be precise, killed them in the *banjar* lands of a village by name Narsapur and declared that they had been killed in an ‘encounter’ in the forests.

Contrast this with an ‘encounter’ killing that took place in Warangal this year, almost exactly one year after the Narsapur

killing. The victims were two young men named Nageswara Rao and Ramakrishna; Nageswara Rao was a student of science and Ramakrishna was a student of a local polytechnic college. They had left their studies and were working as full-time organisers for a Naxalite group. Their killing allegedly took place on a relatively deserted road that links Kazipet railway junction to old Warangal, by-passing the central part of the town. The road, appropriately in retrospect, is named Hunter Road. I do not know whether it is a proper noun or somebody used to hunt foxes there in the past, for there is a residential locality by name Foxes' Hill nearby. In recognition of the onward march of civilisation, higher animal species are hunted there now. The police story is that the two youth confronted them with arms on this road during the midnight of May 20-21, and lost their lives in consequence, though nothing (as usual) happened to the policemen. The real story (again as usual) is quite different. Nageswara Rao was arrested on the evening of May 20 at about 7 pm from a house at Kazipet, and Ramakrishna at about 11 pm the same night from a house at old Warangal town. Where exactly they were killed is not known - the most commonly heard rumour is that they were gunned down inside the spacious compound of the Regional Engineering College, one of the bigger and more reputed institutes of technology in the country. Since the campus was at that time closed for the summer vacation and the only academic activity, if any, would probably have been a summer school in holography or thermo-elasticity or some such esoteric subject, attended by not more than a couple of dozen participants, there is nothing unbelievable about the rumour, however incredible it may sound to those who are new to the ways of the Andhra police. Indeed, it would be quite in keeping with the black sense of humour acquired by the Andhra police, who have a special hatred of college campuses for being 'hotbeds of extremism', to use their pet phrase. What is more

than a rumour, however, is that the boys had eight evenly spaced bullet injuries in pairs from the hip upwards to the chest, one on the left and one on the right. This was noted by their relatives who were (for a change) given the bodies to be cremated.

Wherever and however they were killed, the police took the bodies and with a sadism unmatched except perhaps in Hitler's Germany, threw them outside the house of Nageswara Rao's elder brother who teaches in a local college, where Nageswara Rao himself was a student until he gave up his studies for what he believed was a higher cause. It is instructive of how heedless the police have become about the need to concoct at least a remotely believable story of an 'encounter', that they neither announced an 'encounter' immediately nor asked immediately for an inquest nor took the bodies to a hospital for confirmation of the death and post-mortem examination. They merely dusted their hands and went home to sleep, and dream perhaps of the reward the Home Minister would soon give them. It was only on the morning of the 21st, after some passers-by noticed the dead bodies and reported to the police, that they casually announced that there had, by the way, been an 'encounter' on Hunter Road the previous night. It was not a hasty or hurried afterthought, but a deliberately contemptuous one, an ostentatious and studied display of the arrogance born of the immunity given to them by the government of N T Rama Rao.

A disused temple for Shiva further down that road was the scene of another 'encounter' killing on September 6. Shyamprasad, a B.Tech student of the Regional Engineering College, and Srinivas, a student of the Arts College, were arrested previously, tortured severely, shot dead and thrown in the temple compound. Of the two, it is undoubted that the police had no reason for killing Srinivas, who had been staying at home in his village, other than that he was arrested along

with Shyamprasad, and left alive would have made an uncomfortable witness. (Not that anybody is likely to have examined him.) This category of incidental victims who are killed because they happen to be at the wrong place by mischance accounts for quite a few of the 'encounter' victims, it must be added.

A different dimension of the studied arrogance of the police was exhibited in Nizamabad district. The Radical Youth League had given a call for a *bandh* in the district on June 12 in protest against police atrocities. The papers of June 11 carried the news item that on the previous night, at 9 pm, the police surprised a group of activists sitting in a high school compound at the taluq headquarters town of Kamareddy; they were, allegedly, planning how to enforce the *bandh* of June 12. When the police came upon them they opened fire with weapons, which fire was returned by the police. The Naxalites' aim, as always, was poor but the better trained policemen hit the target and killed one person, described as an 'unknown Naxalite'. This is not the first time, nor is it going to be the last, when an unknown and unidentified person is killed by the police and is later described as a Naxalite, in an act of post-mortem political baptism. Usually, the identity is fixed by some leaflets or books found on the person; in this instance he is supposed to have had a dangerous foreign-made revolver with him, though he obviously did not know how to use it.

However, the entire story is open to question. The high school building is located in a busy part of Kamareddy, a prosperous taluq town on the 7th National Highway. The 'encounter' is supposed to have taken place at 9 pm, which is too early for the town to go to sleep. And yet, nobody in the vicinity had heard any exchange of fire that night. Obviously, the police had caught their victim and killed him somewhere else, brought the dead body to dump it in the High School

compound, and invented the story of a conspiracy taking place there to enforce the bandh of June 12. The only authentic part of the story is a truly Freudian slip; in inventing the conspiracy, the police unwittingly revealed why they had killed the boy; it was to tell all concerned that if you try to have *bandhs* and *hartals* - or any agitation for that matter - against police atrocities, we are going to celebrate it by killing some more of you.

This was confirmed a few days later. In protest against the 'encounter' described above the organisers gave a call for yet another bandh of the district on June 25. In the early hours of that day, there was an 'encounter' on the outskirts of Nizamabad town itself, and a person by name Narayana was killed. The spot of the killing was the bund of a canal coming into the town. The confrontation was supposed to have taken place at 1.30 am, but workers of the pump house that is hardly 150 metres from the spot of the killing, and which works round the clock, heard no sounds that night and knew nothing of the alleged 'encounter' until they saw a police jeep roaming around the place at about 5 am on the morning of the 25th. Moreover, it is reliably learnt that the victim was actually arrested by the police a few days prior to the killing at a locality called Dubba in the town. He was obviously tortured for a few days, then killed and the body thrown on the outskirts of the town. In view of the bandh planned for the morning, the killing was quite literally a case of silencing protest with guns.

The absolute freedom given to the police by NTR's government is beyond all comprehension. Today there is no count how many armed policemen are roaming around the north Telangana districts, and the Eastern Ghat forests of Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts. The typical policeman hereabouts is not the idiotic bungler nor the pot-bellied and greasy specimen in khaki affected by the

occupational disease of sadism, popularised by films. He is mostly young and tough; he does not dress in khaki but adopts protective colouring to match the need; he is not armed with the infamous .303 (butt of much ridicule at the hands of Police Commission reports for its inefficacy in killing people) but with an automatic weapon; he is subjected to none of the temporary discomfiture of a khaki-clad policeman in the event of his killing somebody - on the contrary he is likely to get a handsome cash reward and a quick promotion in case he has killed somebody important enough. The best place to see him is at any taluk or district headquarters' town, at dusk on any day, as he walks into the police station or headquarters, picks up his automatic weapon, puts it in a bag hung from the shoulder, and walks out menacingly in the company of his comrades to get into a jeep that frequently has no number plate. You can then, if you have enough imagination, picture him roaming around the villages throughout the night, death in his heart and in his hands.

It will not require much persuasion to accept that this new creature is a menace not only to the Naxalite activists but to the common people as well. Immunity from prosecution, a possible reward according to the identity of the victim, an automatic weapon at hand and the anonymity of plainclothes is a deadly combination. And there have been at least two incidents this year in which by 'mistake' persons other than Naxalites were fired at, one of them fatally.

On New Year's day 1986, the police of Godavarikhani in the coal belt of Karimnagar heard that some Naxalites had gathered in a miner's residence near the eighth incline; they went there immediately only to discover that the Naxalites, if they had ever been there, had left. Instead, they saw a young man walking briskly in the dark. They naturally took him to be one of the Naxalites that had fled, and fired with their

automatic weapons. He was hit and he fell. The police then discovered that far from being a Naxalite, the injured youth, Jayaraj by name, was the son of a mining officer. They handsomely admitted their 'mistake', took him to a hospital, and saw to it that he survived.

The youth had the good fortune of being an officer's son. But two days later, on January 3, a similar incident happened in Warangal district in which the victim, a poor young man by name Narsaiah, lost his life. He was walking past an armed outpost at Ootlamatwada in Gudur taluk of the Godavari forest along with a friend. The outpost police saw him, became suspicious, chased him and killed him. The Superintendent of Police admitted the next day that a 'mistake' had been committed (not in shooting down an unarmed person, but in shooting down an unarmed person who further happened not to be a Naxalite); and paid compensation of Rs 2,000 to the family.

The 'encounters' tally has now reached 51 counting from January 1985. As the scene of the killing shifts more and more into the heart of populous towns, and the stories put out sound less and less credible and nonchalantly so, a desperate sense of helplessness is the first and most easy reaction. To protest seems like beating upon a wall insulated against sound by a vacuum of incomprehension on one side and the deafeningly senseless noise of what passes for 'politics' in this land on the other. Perhaps the democratic rights movement will soon have to adopt the *karmanyeva adbikaraste* philosophy of the Bhagavadgita.

EPW, 04.10.1986

Murder of a Veteran Democrat

He was an affectionate and lovable old man. His weather beaten face always managed to have just three days' growth of stubble, and he had the habit of stroking it contemplatively while talking. With 40 years' contribution to the Left and democratic movements behind him, and that too in ever-turbulent Telangana, he commanded a recognition and reluctant respect that he was confident would save him from the worst-intentioned enemy. 'Even the *Razakaars* could not kill me when I was much younger; nobody will touch the hair on my head today' he would frequently tell well-wishers. He reckoned wrong there. What Kasim Rizvi's *Razakaars* could not do, and what the 200 odd landlords of Karimnagar supplied with arms by the State during the last five years did not dare to do, NT Rama Rao's police could and did. They pulled him out of his house in the early hours of this November 7 and shot him dead point-blank.

Japa Lakshma Reddy was a peasant through and through. He belonged to Algunoor, 5 kms From Karimnagar town and on the banks of the Manair, a tributary to the Godavari. He had about 10 acres of land and a house in the village. In the late forties, as a young man in his twenties, he joined the Telangana peasant uprising. It was precisely peasants of his class (and frequently also his caste) that formed the most visible and vocal core of that uprising. He could recall till his last days how peasants of his class burnt with resentment at the obscene exploitation and plunder they were subjected to by the

Desmukhs, how they were devastated - of land, cattle and gold - by the inflation years of the Second World War, and how as a consequence they all turned to Communist politics. And he would end his recollections invariably with the caution that it was precisely this class that had lost its enthusiasm for the struggle after Nehru's troops entered Hyderabad, and this loss of spirit contributed significantly to the calling off of the struggle. He himself was one of those who did not lose spirit, then or ever.

Not being very much educated in a formal sense (he gave up studies as an intermediate student) he worked mainly as a courier for the movement in those days, carrying messages between leaders and cadre of the underground. Being a courier is a risky business, as anyone who has ever been one will testify. If you are caught, the police know very well that you know a lot, and also that you are a nobody for the outside world and you can be tortured merrily without raising the sort of fuss or retaliation that torture of a prominent leader would call forth. In the recent Naxalite movement in Andhra, perhaps the worst victims of police torture have been couriers. Lakshma Reddy was one of the lucky ones who came through unscathed; he was luckier still to escape the wrath of the *Razakars* whose viciousness was worse than that of the police and the military for it was compounded by communal passion. He was fond of recounting a story of an encounter he once had with a *Razakar*: that man had a gun in his hands and Lakshma Reddy walked plumb into him; he was too scared to turn back and run and so stood rock still and commended himself to God. The *Razakar*, on his part, mistook this immobility for the self-assurance of an armed man, got scared in turn, dropped his gun and ran for life.

After the withdrawal of the armed struggle by the CPI, Lakshma Reddy worked in the party for a long time. He was in

the Karimnagar District Committee of the party from 1950 to 1959. He was elected sarpanch of his village panchayat and served in that post for 10 to 15 years. He quit the party in 1959 but joined an independent Marxist group that formed itself in the district in 1962, as part of the ferment that preceded the split in the CPI in 1964. It remains a matter of some doubt whether the Naxalbari uprising found an immediate supporter in him, for he was, as I said, a peasant through and through and talked in terms of events, impressions and morals, not years and days.

But, certainly, the escalating ‘encounter’ killings of the early seventies found a vocal protestor in him, and when the civil liberties movement took off in Andhra, he was one of the first to join it. Today the civil liberties movement is staffed by academics, journalists and lawyers, but when it started in Andhra in the early seventies it was poets - led by Mahakavi Sri Sri - who were at the forefront. When Sri Sri, as the first president of AP Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) visited Karimnagar in 1974, Lakshma Reddy was the person who took upon himself the burden of organising a civil liberties meeting.

Builder of Civil Rights Movement

But he really discovered the vocation of the evening of his life in the civil liberties movement after the lifting of the Emergency. The year 1978 saw the notification of two (subsequently subdivided into four) talukas - Jagtial and Sirsilla - of Karimnagar as ‘disturbed areas’ under the AP Suppression of Disturbances Act; and much earlier the Godavari forest region of Manthani and Mahadevpur had been declared ‘disturbed’. To take upon oneself the task of organising a civil liberties movement in such a place requires a lot of guts and determination and Lakshma Reddy had these qualities in good measure. He was one of the builders of the civil liberties

movement in Andhra. A number of young people of Karimnagar - lawyers and college teachers - were inspired as much by him as by the imperatives of the situation to join the civil liberties movement. He watched them and helped them develop into good activists, and guided them in his capacity as president and secretary of the Karimnagar district unit of APCLC. Later, he watched them being assaulted, arrested, tortured and killed, and being forced to resign from the organisation, but himself withstood the onslaught to the end. The State realised that with some people the only way to silence them is to silence them for good, and it did just that to him.

For civil liberties organisations in India, 'fact finding' has from the beginning been the major task. I do not think civil liberties organisations in any other country do as much fact finding as they do in India. The Indian village is no longer economically self-contained but that only means that goods enter and leave the village, not that people, ideas and news are exchanged in any significant measure with the outside world. News of violation of people's rights, especially, remains within the village - except to the extent that it is wafted out of all shape on the breeze of rumour - unless somebody from outside takes the trouble to uncover the facts and report them to the world. And if the violation in question is not a casual or local phenomenon but deliberate and considered State policy, the difficulty of even fact-finding gets compounded by fear. Over the years fear has become almost a physical presence in the villages of the 'disturbed' areas of Karimnagar. Even to talk to journalists or civil liberties people has become a dangerous thing. The most surprising thing about the Arwal massacre of Bihar was that the survivors talked frankly to journalists and civil liberties people; what was possible in Bindeswari Dubey's Bihar would be impossible in NTR's Andhra. If you talk to them today the police will come again tomorrow, pick up those

who have talked, and thrash them. And so, if the police have raided your house and destroyed it brick by brick and tile by tile, you tell civil liberties people with a straight face that you destroyed the house yourself out of a maniacal whim. If the police have picked up your son and are torturing him and are likely to kill him, you say that you don't know where your son is. If the police have beaten you black and blue because they want you to hand over your son and you either cannot or will not oblige, you pretend that the blue-black welts on your body have been there since birth. In a situation of this kind, to make people talk is an effort all by itself. You cannot make them talk if you carry a questionnaire with you. Instead you talk about the rains and the crops, about goats and sheep and the new diseases they are dying of, you tell them your caste and hunt up your relations in the village; and may be half an hour of such effort will make people loosen up; they will then tell you how the police destroyed their houses, pulled down the roofs and walls, drove cattle into their fields, threw grain and clothes and anything they could lay their hands on into the well, how they beat them and tortured them, mounted them upon rollers and trampled upon them, slung them in a bundle between two chairs and thrashed them, how they abused the women in unprintably vulgar language and threw down old people and children from the cots - they will tell you how the police did all this, and if you ask them why they will also tell you that their only crime was that they happened to be sympathisers of the Naxalite groups.

Lakshma Reddy was an expert in making people talk. He was, for all his political sophistication, one of them and quite consciously remained one of them; he spoke their language and their idiom; and if he disagreed with their cultural presuppositions where they did injury to democratic notions

he did so without a sense of alien-ness or a rupture. The people recognised him as one of their own and shared with him confidence - including political confidences - which they would not normally share with outsiders.

Hunted Man

If all this made him a valuable person for the democratic movement, it equally made him hateful to the anti-democratic forces. Not only he but all the civil liberties activists of Karimnagar and Warangal districts became objects of attack. On January 12, 1985 Gopi Rajanna, advocate of Jagtial, was shot dead outside his house by RSS elements carrying arms given to them by the State to defend themselves from 'extremists'. After that, one after another, civil liberties activities of the two districts, all of them lawyers, lecturers and doctors, were attacked viciously. Dr Ramanadham of Warangal was shot dead by the police on September 3, 1985. Others were locked up, tortured, beaten and threatened that if they did not give up civil liberties work and resign from APCLC they would suffer worse. Their houses and their land would be devastated; they would lose their jobs and they would not find anybody to even rent them a house to live in; the advocates among them would find their clients being threatened to take back the *Vakaalat*. The threats were so systematically enforced - by an unholy combination of the RSS and the police - that almost all the civil liberties activists of the two districts resigned from the organisation, practically at gunpoint. There were just two or three exceptions and Lakshma Reddy was not only one of them, he was the most visible of them. Until a few days before his murder statements signed by him continued to appear in the Press, alleging that so-and-so was being held in illegal custody by the police and there was danger of his being killed in a fake 'encounter'. Over the last decade or so of its existence,

the civil liberties movement in Andhra must have saved countless lives by such timely press releases. And this is one task that Lakshma Reddy refused to be coerced into desisting from. “We may be unable to hold public meetings, print leaflets or investigate into police atrocities and illegal killings; but nobody is going to stop us from letting the world know of illegal detention - and a possible encounter killing” he would say. And he had the confidence that his age and long standing as a public figure would save him from being killed at least, come what may. He continued to hold this belief even after the police warned him more or less openly. Last year the Karimnagar police floated an organisation bearing the unwieldy name - Forum for Extremist and Radical Victims Association (with the inspired acronym FEAR VICAS). The organisation consists of police informers, suspended cops, some lumpen elements and ex-landlords deprived of their fangs by the CPI (ML) movement. The main purpose of this organisation was to function as a counter-civil liberties organisation, disturbing civil liberties meetings, threatening civil liberties activists, petitioning the government for more police camps and more police stations, for more sophisticated arms to the police, etc. On May 23 this year they gave a call for a bandh of Karimnagar against Naxalite violence. That day plainclothes police led by the SI, Lower Manair Dam police station, raided Lakshma Reddy’s house at a time when he was not there, manhandled his son, and threatened that their father would be killed. Lakshma Reddy, however, decided not to be browbeaten by such threats. The police waited for their chance to attack him.

The chance came in the form of the murder of Buchi Reddy, DSP Peddapalli, by some Naxalites, on the evening of November 6. Whatever the reason for killing him, the daily Press, fed on filmi stories of revenge, came up with the

calculation that three ‘encounters’ accounting for nine deaths had taken place in the area under the jurisdiction of this DSP during the last two years; (adding with some relish the incorrect piece of melodrama that he had personally participated in the killings - one report even going to the extent of saying that he personally ‘hunted down’ the Naxalite activists); and that hundreds of houses of Naxalite activists and their sympathisers had been destroyed and razed to the ground in the four *talukas* within his jurisdiction; and that therefore the Naxalites had killed him in revenge. Oddly enough, these reports in the Press, which is normally by no means sympathetic to the Naxalite movement, have unwittingly done a lot to justify the killing of the police officer in the eyes of the public, and to weaken the objections of political critics who saw it as a piece of senseless heroism.

Anyway, the instant reaction of the police was to kill a civil liberties activist, just as they killed Dr Ramanadham at Warangal last year when some Naxalites killed the SI of Kazipet. In the early hours of November 7, the police visited all the ex-civil liberties activists of Karimnagar and took two of them, both advocates, into custody. They were let off later, but for Lakshma Reddy, who had refused to quit the civil liberties movement, was reserved a different fate. Four policemen in plainclothes went in a white coloured Ambassador car to his house at Algunoor and knocked on the door. The time was about 4 am. Lakshma Reddy opened the door. The policemen bolted the door behind him, one of them held his hands and the others shot him dead. His son recognised an SI of Karimnagar among the assailants and gave the name to the Press. The young man was so outraged that he even took out an axe and threatened to go to Karimnagar and kill the SI. It was with difficulty that people around restrained him. But two

days later he was forced by threats whose nature one can easily guess to retract and say that he did not recognise anyone. Taking advantage of his retraction the police sent summons to the reporter of the Telugu daily *Andhra Jyoti*, which had published a report quoting Lakshma Reddy's son; the reporter was summoned to the office of the Circle Inspector, Husnabad, to give the police the information he possessed! The threat remains implicit in the summons, of course, that once he goes there the information will be extracted from him by means other than mere questioning. Indeed, this implicit threat is the real purpose of the summons: once such summons are accepted by the journalist community as normal, it becomes a very effective method of preventing the publication of news of lawless behaviour by the police.

EPW, 13.12.1986

***'Missing'* : Telugu Desam Style**

A documentary on post-Allende Chile, made by an Australian producer, tells a gruesome tale of 'missing' persons. About 2,500 Leftist opponents of the regime have been 'missing' in that country, and this tale is about two of them, one a leader of a teachers' organisation. The events that follow their 'disappearance' have a bizarrely familiar ring. The friends and comrades of the 'missing' persons accuse the government of having picked them up and done away with them. The government at first denies the fact. The teacher's colleagues hold a protest meeting at his college, at which his teenaged son makes a speech; he warns them that they must do something before his father becomes one more corpse floating anonymously down the river. A few days later, a couple of dead bodies are discovered floating down the river. They are identified as those of the two missing men. The democratic minded public rises in protest, led by a church-based human rights group. Predictably, government-sponsored righteous Christians demonstrate outside the church, accusing the priests of preaching Communism in the name of human rights. The priest is at that time actually telling the congregation inside that atrocities like beating up demonstrators, nightly raids on poor slum dwellers, etc, cannot be accepted silently. The government for its part goes on air with the statement that unnamed international terrorists or revolutionaries or whatever, who cannot forgive failure, must have killed these men for having failed to make a revolution in Chile; and that all this

noise about human rights is merely an attempt to kill a second bird with the same stone by putting the blame for their crime on the Chilean government. The denouement - the government bowing to the pressure of public opinion and accepting its crime - is untypical of such situations and testifies more to the strength of the democratic opposition in Chile than to anything paradigmatically inherent to State terrorism as such.

What is remarkable is how events, ideas and abuses repeat themselves thousands of miles away. While the phenomenon described as 'missing' has been made famous by the police and military establishments of the South American dictatorships, there is nothing specifically Latin about it, except to the extent that quantity makes a difference to quality and conscious intention lends significance to both. Making people 'disappear' is one of the universal methods employed in maintaining law and order, safeguarding national security and protecting public peace. When the police or other security forces kill someone, it is always a matter of choice whether they describe the killing as something palatable to law and morality or pretend that they have never seen the victim and that he has just vanished. But, when making people 'disappear' becomes a conscious strategy pursued by the State to eliminate political opponents, it becomes significant. Death is death, but there is something specially chilling about an unrecorded and unacknowledged killing. An announcement of a death in (say) an 'encounter'; a date, a time and a place of killing; a story - even a fabricated one - of the clash; and an enquiry - even an eyewash - into the event, offers some sense of security, even if it makes no real difference to the dead body. But when people just disappear and turn into unidentified corpses discovered on a river bank or a railway track - or worse still vanish for good without leaving a trace behind - then that is a qualitatively different situation altogether.

Andhra Pradesh has been famous for ‘encounters’ for more than a decade and a half. About 450 political activists were killed up to 1977; after a gap of three years, the ‘encounters’ picked up again after 1980, continued after NTR came to power in 1983, and increased in frequency by a marked jump after his re-election in 1985. A total of 55 political activists have been killed in this State in ‘encounters’ starting with January 1985, and there is no sign of a let-up in the near future. In each case, there is first an announcement of an armed ‘encounter’ between the victim and the police, followed sometimes by vivid stories of the alleged incident; then there follows an inquest and a magisterial enquiry, by a *tabasildar* or higher revenue official; the Press is full of statements and counter-statements, allegations and investigations, by the victim’s comrades, journalists, the government and civil liberties organisations; and as a finale, a cash award is given to the brave police officer who has committed the murder. In summary, killing someone in an ‘encounter’ is not all that simple and straightforward. In a given combination of circumstances it can even turn into a headache for the government, as happened for instance after the lifting of the Emergency, when the government was forced to institute a judicial enquiry into ‘encounter’ killings.

This realisation appears to have dawned on the AP police in recent times; and the more the Press and civil liberties organisations raise a hue and cry about ‘encounter’ killings, the more the police have been tempted to discover new ways of getting rid of Naxalite activists. And making people just ‘disappear’ is the easiest alternative. What began seemingly casually in December 1984 has now started revealing the contours of a strategy. There have been at least six cases of Naxalite activists being picked up by the police and either just

disappearing or turning up as dead bodies, ostensibly victims of ‘accidents’. How many more have already suffered this fate is not known - indeed going unrecorded is simultaneously the terror of the phenomenon of ‘missing’ and its convenience for the State.

On October 12, 1986, two persons were picked up from a lodging house in Vijayawada. One of them was Dr Prasad, at one time a medical practitioner of Rajahmundry who had become a full-time activist of a Naxalite group. The other person is believed to have been produced before a magistrate somewhere in Karnataka but Prasad himself has definitely disappeared. One rumour is that on November 28, he was shot dead at Addateegala in the East Godavari forest; but the police have not announced an ‘encounter’. Instead they have just been denying that they ever arrested him. And just as the news of his ‘disappearance’ was making the rounds in the State, two unidentified and unclaimed dead bodies turned up in Karimnagar district one day, floating down the Kakatiya canal of the Sriram Sagar project on the Godavari. To this day the identity of the dead bodies remains to be established, and whether one of them could be the ‘missing’ doctor of Rajahmundry remains a possibility.

They could have been two others also: Benjamin and Sukhjeevan Reddy, radical activists of Hyderabad, were picked up in November 1985 on the outskirts of the city. For about six months after the arrest the police unofficially acknowledged their arrest, that is to say admitted to their friends and relatives that the two young men were with them, though to a *Habeas Corpus* petition in the High Court they replied that they had never arrested them. But sometime around the middle of 1986, the police began to deny any knowledge of the arrest even in private. To this day, the two young men have not been seen,

and it is highly unlikely that they are still alive and in detention in some lock-up a year and a half after their arrest.

Some instances, however, are clearer: one was Sheikh Imam, an activist from a poor Muslim family of Warangal. He was arrested, tortured to death and the dead body was thrown under an express train on April 22, 1986. The next day the police ‘discovered’ the dead body, conducted an inquest and announced that an extremist carrying explosives and arms had slipped and fallen under the train, trying to board it in a hurry. This young man has actually been hunted for by the police of Mahbubabad taluk for at least two years, and they had repeatedly threatened in the presence of witnesses that they would kill him if they found him. A less categorical case is that of Yakaiah, a *Harijan* youth, again of Warangal. He was a student of a technical institute in the town, and was staying at one of the Social Welfare department’s hostels for students of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. These hostels, suspected of being ‘hotbeds of extremism’, in the language of the police, are regularly subjected to nightly raids by the police all over the north Telangana districts, especially Warangal and Karimnagar. Yakaiah was picked up on November 17, 1985, was known to have been kept in a police station in Warangal for some days, and then just vanished. For some time there was a rumour that an anonymous dead body was burnt by the police near a hillock to the south of the town, and the dead body could have been Yakaiah’s. But the police have vehemently denied it and there is no way of proving anything.

To continue with the analogy of Chile, when there was a protest against the abduction and ‘disappearance’ of Dr Prasad, what the police did was to first of all deny the arrest, and then take vengeance against the protestors by arresting SSC Bose, a civil rights lawyer of Vijayawada, twice within the space of

one month, and that too under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act. The first time he was charged with inciting hatred against the State by publishing leaflets against police atrocities, and the second time the accusation was that he had tried to coerce the State by conspiring to set on fire a bus of the Road Transport Corporation. The charges owe their peculiarity, of course, to the fact that to bring a charge under the Terrorist Act, it is necessary to allege that the crime - whichever it is - was committed with a view of coercing the State or creating 'enmity' between two communities. While it is the latter of the two predicates that has been mainly operative in Punjab, for which the Act was purportedly made, the rulers of Andhra realised quite soon (as far back as October 1985, in fact) that the former gives them a golden chance to put inside all manner of inconvenient people under the Terrorist Act. I am not aware how blithely the Act is being used in Punjab, but its use in AP, if properly documented, is bound to beat all records for arbitrariness in the implementation of laws which are arbitrary to begin with. Certainly, one has not heard of lawyers who do the *vakaalat* of Khalistan activists, or those who work for civil liberties, being held under the Terrorist Act in Punjab, but in Andhra that is happening left and right.

To get back to our theme, there is strong reason to believe that making people 'disappear' is not a casual phenomenon but a conscious strategy being pursued by the police in the face of rising protest against more conventional police methods of getting rid of people. For the method is being employed also against ordinary criminal suspects; exact numbers, dates, names and places are difficult to give - that is precisely the main intention in pursuing this strategy - but there are frequent allegations in the Press by kith and kin of ordinary criminal suspects that so-and-so has been picked up by the police and

has 'disappeared'. Sometimes the allegation turns out to be a false alarm, or else it has the hoped-for effect of forcing the police to produce the person in court. But there have been a few cases where the allegation has remained ominously suspended in the air.

Perhaps it proves - if it proves anything at all - that the more we succeed in exposing State terrorism, the more devious forms it adopts; and then the more difficult it becomes to fight it. One can either draw a pessimistic moral or a lesson of caution from this, and it is by no means a matter of indifference which of the two one chooses to draw.

EPW, 28.02.1987

Physiognomy of Some Proscribed Poems

*I did not supply the explosives
nor ideas for that matter
It was you who trod with iron heels
upon the ant-hill
And from the trampled earth vengeance
was born*

*It was you who struck the bee-hive
with your lathi
The sound of the scattering bees
exploded in your heart
and your shaken visage was blotched red with fear*

*You mistook
the victory drum in the heart of the
masses for a person
and trained your guns
Revolution reverberated from the four horizons*

This poem was written in the Central Prison at Warangal by Varavara Rao in January 1985. That was the first of the three Januaries in succession that he would spend in jail; at that time he had been remanded to prison on three charges, applied one after the other, so that the total period of remand

would be as long as possible; each charge was applied after he came out on bail in the previous one. The gist of the charges was that he had supplied explosives to Naxalite youth and had organized a conspiracy to attack and kill a circle inspector of police. The inspector, as a matter of fact, was neither attacked nor injured, let alone killed. It was in an inspired poetic response to this charge that Varavara Rao wrote this poem confessing 'I did not supply the explosives, nor ideas for that matter'.

When he finally got bail on the three charges, the police tried to keep him in jail by manufacturing an NSA warrant against him. If they had played it safe by just mentioning the same three charges as the grounds of detention - a time-honoured method of defeating bail orders - the district magistrate would have had no option but to sign it; but the police were a little too ambitious and added one more ground: that Varavara Rao had entered into a criminal conspiracy with underground Naxalites to kill some people. Unfortunately the dates they chose for the conspiracy they invented in keeping with their contempt for veracity - were three days on which Varavara Rao was still in prison, and the district magistrate refused to issue the warrant of detention. For this and other similar indiscretions he was later in the year to be transferred to an obscure posting at Hyderabad.

Today Varavara Rao is one once again in prison at Secunderabad. He has been there for more than a year now. This detention is 'voluntary'; for he had no other way of safeguarding his life from the murderous police of the State. He therefore got his bail in the decade-old Secunderabad Conspiracy Case cancelled and opted to go to jail. But the State is unrelenting in its witch-hunt of this most persecuted poet in India's recent history. The ground is prepared by policemen - the superintendent of police of Warangal, for

instance - declaring in Press interviews that he is no poet at all, but a rabble-rouser; and then a volume of non-poetry of this non-poet is proscribed by the government through an order that is quoted in a Press release but - nearly two months later - is yet to be published in the gazette.

Simultaneously, the State places extraordinarily severe - and illegal - restrictions on him while he is in jail. There is no provision in the Prison Manual of AP to prohibit interviews for an undertrial prisoner with any class of visitors; the only provision is a punishment clause that allows the prison superintendent to cancel a prisoner's interviews for a specified period and that too only for infringement of prison discipline, and neither for the prisoner's political beliefs nor for any consideration related to the gravity of the charge he/she is accused of. And even this punishment is to follow the principles of natural justice, as emphasized by the Supreme Court of India in *Sunil Batra vs Delhi Administration*. Yet, Varavara Rao, who is not an NSA detenu but technically speaking only an undertrial prisoner, is being allowed interviews only with his wife and children, and that too with a special branch policeman sitting almost between them and taking down every single word of their conversation. Books sent to him by friends are frequently withheld and he is allowed to see only one newspaper and that too the one chosen by the jailor.

If all this seems maniacal and paranoid, then the only explanation is that it is so; as another poem in this proscribed collection says (*He got scared of the Earth*):

*Heaping threats upon threats
Spreading fear upon fear
He himself got scared
He got scared of habitations*

*He got scared of schools
He got scared of water
He got scared of shadows*

.....

*He shackled liberty
But when the hand-cuff moved
He got scared at the sound.*

It is difficult to think of a more apt commentary upon the poet's own persecution. But then the poet himself provides a fitting answer, in a poem dedicated to Benjamin Moloise: when the injustice of a regressed era throttles the billowing clouds of time:

*Neither blood flows nor tears
Lightning become thunder
Raindrops become a tidal wave
Mother Earth wipes her eyes
And the poet's message
Flows out from between the prison bars.*

Persecution thus makes some kind of sense, and its futility is equally evident but one is still left wondering why the persecution must take the form of proscription. Even if NTR's ingrained arrogance makes him insensitive to such matters, and the average policeman's hatred of writers (the viciousness of this feeling must be experienced to be understood) has an equally deadening effect on the imagination of the higher-ups in the State's police, some bureaucrat or advisor somewhere (and NTR does have some friends who profess to believe in dialectical materialism and should therefore know some history) must have told the rulers of the State that even in the most extraordinary circumstances, proscription of poetry goes down badly with the articulate public. If they have nevertheless gone

through with the ban, then there must be something extra in the poems that has hurt a particularly raw nerve. If one keeps in mind the fact that about the only thing that really touches a raw spot in the ego of NTR's administration is effective criticism of its police, then the full rationality of this unreason becomes clear.

For while the proscribed collections is called '*Bhavishtyat Chitrapatam*' (*Picture-frame of the Future*), its most trenchant and moving poems deal with themes, not of any revolution, but police torture and killings. These are not perorations that describe the atrocities in gory detail (the highly Sanskritised nature of literary Telugu makes it perilously apt for such thunderings) but poems full of irony, sensitivity and, of course, anger. The best of Varavara Rao's poems have the extraordinary quality of curving into themselves in a loop as they move forward, much like a circumferential point on a moving wheel, where a thoughtful involution rides an uncompromising objective movement that drives the focus of the involution forward. Being neither a poet nor a competent critic of poetry, I would not venture to stake too much on the idea that this is perhaps what Marxist poetry should be like, but then his poetry itself is worth studying in any serious attempt to answer that question.

One poem that must certainly have hurt NTR's police is the one entitled 'butcher'; it is the tale told by a Muslim butcher of Kamareddy town who was witness to the killing of a 'radical' youth on May 15, 1985. The boy, a junior college student, was caught by the police when he was going around the town asking shop-keepers to pull down their shutters in protest against 'encounter' killings. They took him to a busy crossroads and beat him to pulp in public view with rifle butts 'as we beat a snake' in the words of the butcher. In Varavara Rao's poem he says:

K Balagopal

*I am a vendor of flesh
If you want to call me a butcher
then that is as you wish
I kill animals every day
I cut their flesh and sell it
Blood to me is a familiar sight
But
It was on that day I saw with my own eyes
the real meaning of butchery*

.....

*I too take lives
but never with hatred
I do sell flesh
but I have never sold myself*

.....

*To me who kills goats every day
The meaning of the cruelty that
combines and conspires to take a life
was revealed that day.*

Though the precise words, it must be added, are the poet's, the thoughts belong to the butcher himself, whose deposition before the sub-divisional magistrate at Kamareddy must be among the most extraordinary of its kind.

But the poem that probably hurt the rulers most is 'Dance of Liberty', written in response to a speech made by the State's Home Minister in Karimnagar, at the height of 'encounter' killings and other brutal forms of police atrocities in the district. In that speech, the Home Minister Vasantha Nageswara Rao, claimed that the State was now made safe for the untrammled play of liberty and freedom. The poet plays upon the Home

Minister's unusual surname 'Vasanta' meaning spring. The spring god, in a macabre mood, invites the dancing girl of liberty to come and play Holi with blood:

Dancing girl of liberty

come dance!

I have prepared the stage of Peace for you

I have prepared the cremation ground

for you

.....

In the shade of my hood

In the shade of my power

In the shade of rulers' umbrella

Held aloft above my power

Dancing girl of liberty

Come dance!

The poem describes one by one the faked 'encounter' killings of that period and creates such a powerful image of blood-thirsty cruelty that it is difficult to think that rulers of the calibre that we have in this State would react with any urge other than the desire to proscribe the whole lot.

This speculation is about what really hurt the rulers of this State; what grounds they have chosen to indicate in the proscription order are as yet unknown and essentially not very relevant except for the purpose of challenging the order in a court of law. In the order they are bound to indicate grounds that will conform to whatever law the proscription is ordered under. In any case the courts in our country have never taken an unequivocal stand in the matter of freedom of expression. In this, as with the rest of the fundamental freedoms of bourgeois civilisation, the exceptional clauses in Article 19 (2) to 19 (6) of the Indian Constitution that allow the freedoms

K Balagopal

to be taken away have generally received juridical preference over 19(1), which allows the freedoms in the first place. Varavara Rao's collection, therefore, will probably stay banned - but then (and here is the most incongruous tail-piece you have ever heard) all the poems in the collection have been published in one magazine or the other during the last year or two, have been read, re-read and quoted, and the collection itself has already been reviewed in many Telugu dailies. Which only goes to prove that reason is of no consequence to feudal pique.

EPW, 28.03.1987

A Tale of Arson

In Chintapalli in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh, the tribals' conflict today, after the statiation of forests, is directly against the State than against non-tribal outsiders. The Communists have been at the forefront of the tribals' struggles against illegal exactions by forest and police officials, for better prices for minor forest produce and for higher wages for work in the Forest Development Corporation's plantations and timber depots. The Andhra Pradesh government has responded with a police campaign to systematically burn down and destroy entire tribal hamlets.

To the officer in charge of the combing party; As the sarpanch of village Sankada has requested the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), Chintapalli, that villages other than those of the Konds should not be burnt down, the DSP has ordered accordingly. Hence as the DSP has ordered that villages and houses of the Bagatas and Gadabas should not be burnt down, I am informing the same to you in my capacity as SHO, Chintapalli police station.

Sd/-

Head Constable

PC No:163

Chinthapalli PS

Dated
3-5-1987

This letter, handwritten and underlined at the right place for emphasis so that the dullest policeman could follow what had been ordered, is not a moth-eaten parchment from the archives of some Mughal *kotwali*. It was actually written on the date

mentioned at the end of the letter and by the gentleman who put his signature on it. If it implies a damning indictment of the police, then perhaps they do not care if they damn themselves in first person and in black and white.

Chintapalli is a Mandal headquarters town perched on the Eastern Ghats in Visakhapatnam district. From Visakhapatnam you go south-west for about a hundred kms, first south along the Calcutta-Madras highway and then west along a road that lies on gradually rising land that must have been forest-covered not more than three decades ago; at the end you reach the abruptly rising ghats. At the foot of the ghats is a village named Downuru, a beautiful anglicised name for the *ur* (an old south Indian word for a village or settlement) that is down the hill. Then you climb up what is locally called the *ghati*, a motoring term that refers not so much to the Eastern Ghats as to the sharp curves and turns you negotiate as you go up the hill, and then you are in Chintapalli. The town lies in what is called the Agency area of Andhra Pradesh that extends along a semi-circular stretch from Khammam and East Godavari through Visakhapatnam to Srikakulam districts. This stretch is shaped not so much like a crescent as a sickle with the handle broken: the eastern end (Srikakulam) is sharp and pointed but the western end (Khammam) is broad and blunt, broader than the middle. It is inhabited by tribes such as the Koyas, Konda Reddis, Bagatas, Gadabas, Savaras, Jatapus, etc. This tribal tract has seen many militant uprisings in the last one hundred years, each uprising followed after its brutal suppression by some reform or the other. Following the uprisings of 1879-80 and 1915-16, the first led by a tribal, Tammanna Dora, and the second by nobody in particular, the Britishers in a fit of paternalism demarcated these forest tracts as an 'Agency area', "inhabited by simple and ignorant people, who by reason of their ignorance and excitable temperament

need handling with tact and sympathy... and require to be sheltered from the subtleties of the Law and the wiles of the more civilised traders and lawyers of the plains". That the Law and the lawyers, and even the traders in their specific contemporary form, were the creatures of the self-same British rule appears to have escaped the notice of this hindsightful benevolence. After the next major uprising in 1922-24, whose leader Alluri Seetarama Raju is much better known than the earlier tribal leaders and has even rather dubiously been converted into a folk hero of NTR's variety of Telugu nationalism, no doubt because he was a non-tribal and in fact belonged to the dominant agricultural caste of the Godavari districts, the entire Agency area acquired better communications, in particular metalled and tarred roads. Today motoring through the Agency can be a pleasure if you have a decent vehicle. And after the next major uprising, the Srikakulam revolt led by the CPI(ML), the hated *Muttadari* system, through which tribal chiefs were converted into revenue farmers, with all the *abwab* and *nasrana* 'rights' that *de facto* go with it, was abolished in 1971. Simultaneously, Tribal Co-operative Corporations were set up to protect the tribals from the private traders; henceforth, tribals would sell the minor forest produce they collected only to the Corporation and could buy their consumption requirements at the same place.

But one major cause of discontent - the reservation of forests for plantations, restriction on shifting (*podu*) cultivation, and generally speaking the conversion of the forests from natural wealth to State property - has not only not been alleviated, it has actually been increasing apace. In reality, all the 'reform' amounts essentially to that, whatever the rhetoric. The forests used to be natural wealth, nobody's private property, and the relations that various sections and classes of the people

entered into with this natural wealth in the process of appropriating it, and the relations they entered into with each other in the course of the appropriation, determined its political economy. There were the tribals who lived in, on and with the forests; there were the land-grabbing non-tribals who occupied land cleared by the tribals, converted some of them into labourers and pushed the rest farther up the hills; and there were the traders who bought up forest produce dirt cheap from the tribals and sold them plains' produce - salt, clothes and drugs - at heavily inflated prices. Ever since the Britishers came this situation has been slowly changing, first through superimposition of the State's administrative authority and superior (revenue) right over the forests, aided by the formal conversion of forest wealth into State property, and culminating in the actual direct appropriation of that wealth by the State in the interests of the principal classes - native and foreign monopolists - whose raw material requirements are managed by the State. It does no damage to the argument that the conversion has been effected through paternalistic measures - demarcation of Agency areas, restriction on private trade, legislation against tribal land alienation, setting up of tribal corporations and lately social forestry - purportedly intended to save the tribals and ecology; it was mostly the tribals that were saved in the beginning and now it is the ecology that is being saved. Protecting the tribal from the land-grabbing non-tribal and the greedy trader actually meant protecting the forest from these predators; and that done, the forest is now being protected from the tribals themselves. Land which is cleared by the tribals for - shifting or settled - cultivation, which plains-people would have grabbed earlier, is now grabbed by a general proclamation of reservation by the Forest Department, and if the tribals still wish to live there they can grow eucalyptus trees under a social forestry scheme on the land on which they grew

jowar or ragi earlier; if they choose not to, they can carry headloads in Kakinada, pull a rickshaw in Rajahmundry, or, if they have acquired by contact some of the dishonesty of civilised people, they can peddle ugly looking tubers as Ayurvedic cure-alls.

It may appear that this statisation of the forests has affected the non-tribal landlords and traders as much as the tribals; but that is not altogether true. The landlords cannot grab much land now - unless they are of the category of State or Central ministers and can get some land de-reserved and recorded in the name of their tribal henchmen - but all the land that was grabbed in the past is intact with them. As for the traders, they thrive on the illegal trade in minor forest produce that goes on behind the back of the official corporations, abetted by the very same tribals, the purported beneficiaries of those bodies, who nevertheless prefer to sell on the sly to private traders, since for all their greed the traders pay more than the Tribal Corporation. The reason for this seemingly senseless paradox is that the trader pays for the forest produce, even if at a highly devalued rate, whereas the Corporation pays, not for the produce, but only for its picking. The one is a price and the other is a wage.

Thus the tribals' conflict today is much more directly against the State than against non-tribal 'outsiders'. It is the State that restricts their right of cultivation, it is the State that evicts them, arrests them and jails them if they cultivate forest land, it is the State that manages the procurement and sale of forest produce, it is the State that monopolises the felling and auctioning of timber, and it is the State that reserves the sole right to reserve or de-reserve any bit of forest land. The non-tribals are there - landlords, contractors and traders - but today they are either the creatures of the State or secondary to it as oppressors of the tribals.

The traditional inhabitants of the Chintapalli forest are the Bagata and Valmiki tribes. They have mostly taken to settled cultivation on one-crop irrigated land, growing paddy or *chollu* (better known as *ragi*), a coarse grain. Most of them either have pattas for their land or when that is not so, the prudence and opportunity that allowed them to confine themselves to what is called the revenue land - as distinct from forest land - helps them avoid the risk of eviction. Other than cultivation of food grains, some of them have groves of mango, banana and jack fruit, which grow plentifully in these forests. Coffee plantations are also catching on as a habit, aided by State encouragement. Among the two tribes, the Bagatas are almost exclusively peasants whereas the Valmikis have a smattering of learning and undertake some petty trade in addition to cultivation. In popular perception the former are 'innocent' and the latter 'lazy' and 'corrupt'.

But our subject is neither of these tribes but a third which does not in fact exist here as far as the State's administration is concerned. Bureaucracy follows its own principles of epistemology and acquires knowledge through means other than the five senses. The tribe thereby rendered non-existent are the Samantas, whose original homeland appears to have been Koraput district of Orissa. They have been migrating steadily from there into Andhra forests, partly due to displacement by Hydel projects but mainly as part of the continuous search for fresh land that defines the life style of shifting cultivators. The migration started in the fifties and by now their number in the Visakhapatnam forests is estimated as close to one lakh.

These people are about as primitive and unassimilated as can be. Conversion of wandering tribes into peasant settlers has generally meant four changes in our history: the tribals

give up shifting cultivation and food gathering for settled plough agriculture; they forget their language and adopt the language of the neighbouring peasants; they give up their food and dress habits and imitate the habits of the same peasants; and they augment their mythology with amazingly absurd, tortuous and often unseemly tales whose total effect is to give the tribe an identity within Hindu society - it is a caste identity in the most perfectly assimilated case - and their gods and goddesses a place, however minor and ridiculous, in the Hindu gallery of deities. The Bagatas and most of the Koyas, among the Godavari and Eastern Ghat tribes, have gone through the whole transformation. The Samantas, however, have remained unassimilated in all these senses. They doggedly refuse to give up *podu* cultivation, they speak their own language and very little of either Oriya or Telugu, their gods remain their own, and even in the matter of dress and food habits they have only recently begun to change, and only a little at that. While earlier their method of cooking was to make a *kbichri* of everything available, they have now learnt to cook the staple cereal and the dal or vegetable separately. And though the men continue to wear only a loin cloth, the women now wear a sari instead of their traditional dress of one piece of cloth across the waist and another across the shoulders. Oddly enough, the agents of this much of change are not proper Hindu peasants but the relatively better assimilated Bagatas, who have been trying to convert the Samantas to 'civilisation', with all the zeal of new converts; and even more oddly the zeal is a consequence of the reformatory urge given to the Bagatas by the Communist Party of India, which has always had a good following among them. The CPI, in fact, won the Chintapalli Mandal President's post in the recent panchayat elections. It is the CPI's Bagata cadre and followers who are the most genuinely distressed at the Samantas' unwillingness to take to 'civilised' ways of living.

However, in spite of this palpable backwardness, the Samantas are not recognised as a tribe in AP. The reason given by officials to a delegation that represented the matter in 1978 was that they are an 'Oriya tribe' and are not native to Andhra and are therefore not listed among the tribes of AP. (So much, by the way, for 'national integration!'). A kindly commissioner of tribal welfare, however, advised them to call themselves Konds instead of Samantas and thereby get recognition, and so we have this absurd paradox that the most backward tribe in the State is not a tribe for its bureaucracy. It may be thought that this makes little difference, since the 'welfare' that the recognised tribes are entitled to includes most things under the sun excepting the one thing they need - land. The Commissioner of Tribal Welfare, the Department of Social Welfare and special agencies like the ITDA have no control over the reservation and de-reservation of forest land, nor the use that the reserved forests are put to. That is certainly so, but one subtlety involved is that not being a tribe, the Samantas are not entitled to *pattas* even where, by accident more than design, the land they have occupied is the revenue banjar inside a gram panchayat and not forest land - an eventuality that frequently occurs with the haphazard delimitation of forest land.

Anyway, the Konds (as we shall call the Samantas hereafter) are blissfully unaware of all these subtleties; the only thing they know is that when they cut down and burn forests - and the clean shave they give the hills is a sight to watch - they are liable to be arrested and charged with a crime. What really happens is not this, of course. What happens is that with the threat of charging them with a crime the forest and police officials collect regular bribes - in cash and kind - from them. Each hamlet is visited once in a while by these men in

khakhi and the tribals give them a good meal of rice and chicken, and send them away with a gift of some cash. Ever since the abolition of *Muttadari*, the fight against these exactions, the fight for better price for minor forest produce and the fight for better wages for work in the Forest Development Corporation's plantations and timber depots, have been the main struggles of the tribals. The Communists have always been at the forefront of these struggles, and in recent years the Kond shifting cultivators in particular have received much support from the armed squads of the CPI(ML) groups, as a consequence of which the exactions of the forest and police officials have decreased considerably.

Since the Konds are the major beneficiaries of the Naxalites' presence in the forests, the State's drive to get rid of the Naxalites has naturally turned its attention on to the Konds. They are frequently arrested on various criminal charges and sent to jail, the substance of the charge being that they are harbouring Naxalites. Such arrests apparently have not had the required effect, for the police decided on more drastic action: burn down tribal hamlets to teach them not to harbour Naxalites. This strategy, which was tried long ago in Srikakulam and is being resurrected now, is not peculiar to Visakhapatnam. It is part of a conscious strategy being pursued by the Telugu Desam government for the last three years. Sympathisers and activists of the CPI (ML) groups have had their fields and house-hold property destroyed and damaged ever since the start of the movement, but for the last three years there has been a definite policy to systematically raze the houses of persons suspected of harbouring Naxalite activists. In the forests, whole hamlets are burnt down, for the undifferentiated tribal communities are either wholly or not at all sympathisers of the CPI(ML) groups; and in the class-differentiated plains,

houses of individual sympathisers belonging to poor and landless peasant classes are picked out and smashed to bits - wall, roof, thatching, tiles and all - with a brutal thoroughness, so that not a bit of the rubble left behind can be used for reconstructing the house again. To my knowledge this tactic was first employed in the summer of 1984, in Huzurabad taluk of Karimnagar district, when about 36 houses in 8 villages were pulled down in search of stolen rifles and has today achieved a tally of about 400 houses destroyed in the plains of Karimnagar district, plus scores of tribal hamlets burnt down - of the Gonds in Adilabad, the Koyas in East Godavari and now the Konds in Visakhapatnam.

The burnings in Visakhapatnam started one by one in the month of March. But it was on May 2 and 3 that a large number of hamlets were burnt down in a single operation almost resembling a planned military action. A police party of about 20 to 30 armed men, led by sub-inspector of police Ammi Naidu of Chintapalli police station, perpetrated the arson. This gentleman must certainly have fancied himself a film star, the way he set about the job. The hamlets he burnt down during these two days lie along a valley between two hills. He started at one end of the valley on the first day and went along burning hamlet after hamlet until he reached the other end of the valley the next evening. The theatricity of his brutality was exhibited in one hamlet (Tentala Veedhi) where the Kond headman pleaded for half an hour's time to at least save the grain and livestock from the houses; the SI slapped him repeatedly across the face, took out a matchbox from the headman's own pocket, first set his hut on fire and then burnt down the rest of the hamlet. He certainly must have modelled himself after the more melodramatic of the film villains.

In all 46 hamlets, with a total of 638 houses, have been burnt down till now. Thousands of fowl, thousands of bags of grain, thousands of rupees in currency notes kept hidden for security in the grain bags and many cattle and goats have perished. At the hamlet of Tiyyamamidi, a man who tried to save his grain got burnt and died. The arson would perhaps have continued for some more days if the SI had not, in his intoxication, burnt down a Bagata hamlet by mistake. This hamlet, Chittamamidi, with 41 houses, populated mainly by the Bagatas (as well as some households of Gadabas, a minor tribe) was completely burnt down though the residents were not *podu* cultivators but settled peasants with recorded rights for their holdings. The news of this burning reached Veeranna Padal, sarpanch of village Sankada, himself a Bagata, an ex-CPI cardholder, and a genuinely public spirited man. He complained to the DSP, Chintapalli, and it was in reaction to his complaint that written instructions - the letter quoted in the beginning - were issued to the combing party in-charge not to burn down Bagata and Gadaba hamlets - implying by default that Kond hamlets should be burnt down. The sarpanch, however, did not rest after achieving this protection for his own community; he took up the matter with the Sub-Collector, ITDA, the Collector, Visakhapatnam, and also to the Press. It was only after the Press published photographs of the holocaust that the arson stopped.

Much later, like doves of peace descending upon a battlefield after the vultures have consumed the dead, the bureaucrats of India's welfare State arrive at Chintapalli. The Principal Secretary, Social Welfare, the Commissioner, Tribal Welfare and less minions reach there in drives and distribute measly alms to the tribals, as if it was a natural calamity and not the policemen of their own government that had destroyed

the tribals' houses, grain and livestock. Indeed, even as they are shedding tears (genuine, let us grant) over the tribals' plight, the Director General of Police goes round the State meeting Pressmen everywhere to justify the arson, abuse the Press for 'playing it up' and offer civil liberties people the challenge of a 'public debate'. And all the while the *sutradhari* of the drama, the Chief Minister of the State, is busy peddling his image as the symbol of democracy, helping Devi Lal win Haryana and confabulating with EMS Namboodiripad on the Presidential elections. All of which makes good material for a farce, if one has the stomach for farces of this kind.

EPW, 18.07.1987

Part II

**The Ruling Classes,
Their Conflicts and Crises**

A False Resurrection: Rise and Fall of Rama Rao

The trunk route from Madras to Calcutta passes through the four rich coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh - East and West Godavari, Guntur and Krishna. The scenery along the route is enchanting to the eyes, for it is green without end, not wildly green as it becomes further up in north coastal Orissa and Bengal, but green in an orderly and disciplined way, as if nature hereabouts calculates the marginal cost of being that much more lush; it is green in a commercial way.

On either side of the route are villages laid end upon end, many of them really small towns; with neatly thatched and tiled houses, and quite a few good buildings, they do not seem to be part of this 'land of the wretched'; but the pride of place is taken by the twin symbols of coastal Andhra: cinema halls that look like rice-mills and rice-mills that look like cinema halls, give or take a chimney stack. The resemblance will no doubt offend any decent architect, but it is true to its salt, for all the surplus that is generated by the delta agriculture goes in exactly two directions: agro-based industry and trade, and film production, distribution and exhibition.

This wealth resides in a class, a class that is predominantly (but by no means exclusively) Kamma by caste and agrarian in its origins, which came of age in the period of the nationalist movement and the agrarian struggles against the Zamindars and the British Raj. These struggles that attended its birth have

also given it the largest share of participation in radical movements; socialism, rationalism, atheism, communism, and radical humanism - you name the heterodoxy and they have seen it. Over the period, they have also grown substantially rich, and have multiplied their riches since the Green Revolution. But while wealth has come their way, they have been systematically kept out of the prime seats of power at Hyderabad. They lost it symbolically when they had to concede the name Visalandhra (in favour of the Hindi-ised Andhra Pradesh) for the State for which they fought the hardest, and had to simultaneously concede their demand for making Vijayawada the capital city: and they lost it substantially as part of the general 'Congress culture' of keeping the economically dominant classes and communities in the States away from the seats of political power.

The rise of NTR and his Telugu Desam Party (TDP) is generally seen as the long overdue assertion of this class (usually further vulgarised as the rise of the Kamma caste). It is true that NTR and his most vociferous followers belong to this class, whether the main body in the coastal districts or the expatriates settled along the irrigation canals and around perennial tanks in Telangana and Rayalaseema; it is true also that most of his most ardent voters belong to these four districts; it is further true that the one man who almost single-handedly led his campaign - Ramoji Rao, editor of the largest circulated Telugu daily *Eenadu* which functioned as a pamphlet for NTR both at the time of his election and during the recent crisis - is a very typical representative of the pushing commercial enterprise of this class; but to stop there would be to read the story by halves.

It is generally recognised that the thirty-odd years of development of India have given rise to unforeseen stresses in

the lower rungs of society; what is equally true is that they have given rise to equally unforeseen stresses in the upper layers too. The monopoly capitalist class proper is numerically very small, and is forced to contend with a large mass of the rich and not very rich sections of the propertied classes (both urban and rural) which are pushing upwards, demanding a variety of concessions and considerations that it is unprepared to give. These classes find the arrangement structured since 1947 inadequate for their aspirations, and want a new deal, which will allow them greater leeway. Whether it is in politics, planning or finance, they are no longer willing to accept what was unilaterally thrust on them as the 'national consensus' in the fifties, taking advantage both of their innocence and of the patriotic and socialist premium that conformity then carried with it. This is at the base of the serious tensions that are besetting all the ruling class parties, including the birth of upstarts like the TDP that keep sprouting now and then. Most such tensions have their own individual origin and characteristics, but the sociological origin of a phenomenon does not exhaust its meaning and significance. The break occurs, and the phenomenon takes birth at the point of maximum abrasion, but once it is born, it attracts a wider constituency that was undirected, undecided or amorphous till then. Some reach out to it because of the logic of its existence, and some because of the mere fact of its existence. Part of the constituency, indeed, is created by the existence of this force it can look to, just as the consequent extension of the constituency acts upon the phenomenon and changes its character appropriately. The propertied classes of delta Andhra spawned and promoted NTR, but once in being (and more so in power) they had to share him with others whose aspirations found a real or imaginary point of intersection with theirs. And these others included not only many of the propertied

classes of the other parts of the State who were dissatisfied with the existing arrangement of the economy and polity, but also the common people who were utterly disgusted with the vulgar depravity of the Congress (I) leaders of the State and whose disgust, which remained unfocused for a long time, at last found a point it could collectively gravitate to, in this one man whom they all knew as well as if he lived in everybody's neighbourhood.

To describe this combination of forces and aspirations and illusions as 'regionalism' is one of the inanities of two-penny journalism. There is perhaps no more frequently repeated frivolity than the profound remark that "regionalism is a rising force in Indian politics". In reality, it is a rising obfuscation of Indian politics (which, of course, does not make it any the less serious). It is resorted to by hack columnists because its status as a popular banality makes serious analysis unnecessary; and as an ideology by a variety of political and economic forces for two reasons; one, since the monopoly capitalist class claims no region of the country for itself and is claimed by none, identification with the aspirations of a region becomes a convenient counter-point in challenging it; two, of all the paradigms of protest, it is regionalism that has the greatest legitimacy in the eyes of the ruling class; it does not carry the stigma that, say, communalism or casteism carry; that much has remained as a residue from the struggles of the fifties and sixties for linguistic States. Thus, it happens that communal, casteist, and plainly economic forces describe themselves in the 'regionalist' idiom, in terms of linguistic aspirations, devolution of power to the States, autonomy of the regions, etc, the journalist picks up the idiom, the ideologue adorns it with statistics, and the metropolitan intellectual builds his analysis around it, because regionalism scares him so much

that he would much rather presume the worst than take the risk of being surprised by it. The upshot of all this is that from being merely acceptable, regionalism even becomes something of a fashion.

We, therefore, have NTR proclaiming to the world about the 'injury done to the Telugu pride', and everybody taking it for granted that such injury has indeed been done, and NTR represents the revival of Telugu nationalism against it. So much has been written about this revival that one is forced to stop and look around for it, and in vain does one do so. Telugu nationalism has had a rather long innings, from the first decade of this century till the end of the fifties, its dying embers were stoked by the agitation of the late sixties for a steel plant at Visakhapatnam, but by the end of the sixties it had died a natural death and there has been no reason for a revival since then; no more injury has been done to Telugus *qua* Telugus than to any other of the principal linguistic groups of India.

Thus it happens that, at the helm of a variety of interests, some narrowly economic, some democratic, but none 'regional' in any but a purely formal geographic sense, but shrouded in the fashionable ideology of 'regionalism', NTR came to power. No more was required of him than that he should ably serve the interests, and maintain the fashion. But there we should reckon with the man and his idiosyncrasies. Trotsky is supposed to have said that history progresses through the natural selection of accidents. As EH Carr points out, Engels expressed much the same idea in the language of the vector mechanics of his days. In the jargon of modern science, one would say that history finds its path by filtering out the deviant noise. But the process of filtering out of the noise is prolonged, usually painful, sometimes amusing, but always educative.

II

Populism was always the weakness of Hindu gods. Witness how freely they have their boons and how often that magnanimity got them into trouble. And NTR, having played those gods too often on the screen during his film career, had come to believe quite honestly that he was one of them. Add to this the fact that he is enormously rich (the minimal rumour is that he is worth Rs 50 crore, black money and white put together), which imbues him with a certain disdainful contempt for the petty rich and their petty graft, and the stage for populism is well set. This populism consists in fighting not so much the real enemies of the people as the most obvious and apparent enemies as perceived by the people - and these are the greedy clerk, the obstructive bureaucrat, the corrupt legislator, etc. It is worth describing a few of these bouts.

The first target of NTR's ire was the clerk, the State Government's Non-Gazetted Officer (NGO), to be precise. He lowered the government employees' age of retirement from 58 to 55, and when the NGOs went on strike against the measure, he unleashed a campaign of slander and vilification against them that surprised everybody. He was the avataar come down to the earth to give succour and comfort to the masses, and here were the greedy clerks obstructing his divine mission. He raved and ranted against them in public meetings and on well-designed posters stuck on the walls all over the State, questioning rhetorically whether the government was to serve the six crore Andhras or the six lakh NGOs. Then came the turn of the corrupt among the bureaucrats, the legislators, and the assorted go-betweens who make a living and much more in the shady corridors of the State Secretariat. It is widely accepted that the organisation of corruption at these levels, which had been comprehensively systematised during Congress

rule (especially the chief ministership of Chenna Reddy), has received a hard blow at NTR's hands. But this statement must be read with care; it was not corruption that he vanquished, but the neat structure into which it had been organised during Congress rule. Corruption itself sprouted soon in a different corner, like the hyacinth weed that bedevils Hyderabad's Hussain Sagar. Whatever his intentions, NTR has neither the imagination nor the mass base to really take on corruption. But in the meanwhile, he did manage to offend and alienate many of these operators, including his own legislators. What they could not understand or forgive was this sudden rectitude on the part of a man who had made his life's fortune in the most corrupt of all worlds, a rectitude that much resembled the phony renunciation of the last leg of the Hindu lifecycle, *sannyasashrama*, whose garb NTR symbolically sported.

As part of this drive against corruption, he initiated the much-promised and much-heard-about Lok Ayukta, and sat in that chair an ex-Chief Justice, ex-Vice-Chancellor, Radical Humanist intellectual with affiliations to Amnesty International; needless to say, he is of NTR's region, class and community. But while we were all given to believe by Janata-ite rhetoric that the Lok Ayukta would be everyman's painless answer to bureaucratic corruption and nepotism, the reality turned out to be much less pleasant. The Lok Ayukta and Upa-Lok Ayukta Act lays down that only officials drawing a salary of Rs 1,150 or more per month come within the jurisdiction of the Act. This automatically puts out of the ring the tehsil clerk, the village bureaucracy, and the rural police inspector; in other words, at one stroke, the Lok Ayukta was made inaccessible and useless to about 70 per cent of the population. (When a complaint was made to the Lok Ayukta concerning torture in police lock-ups in Warangal district, it was returned with the

comment that all the allegations are against head constables and sub-inspectors of police, who do not come within the purview of the Act - as if the Director General of Police would come down to the lock-ups and torture people!) The Act also says that when a complaint is given against an official to the Lok Ayukta, a copy of the same should be sent to the superior authorities over the official - whereas in reality, it is essential that the complaint should be kept a secret at least until the preliminary enquiry is over, if harassment and victimisation are to be avoided. To top it off, there is the startling provision in the Act that if a complaint is found to be false, the complainant can be prosecuted.

Anyway, a moth-eaten Lok Ayukta is better than *none*, and the Telugu people got one. But NTR's flair for mythology and history was not satisfied with it. He resurrected Asoka's 2,300 year-old institution of *Dharma Mahamatra* (spelt Dharma by NTR's government), and hung that mantle on yet another bureaucrat. But while the Mauryan original was expected to ensure compliance with *dhamma suo moto*, so to say, this modern bureaucratic version was hedged about with suitable rules and regulations, and indeed it was not clear to anyone (least of all to the incumbents themselves) where the Lok Ayukta called off, and where the Dharma Mahamatra began; anyway, once again, a moth-eaten Dharma Mahamatra is better than none, and the Telugu people got one. But this bi-millennial resurrection, in a reversal of Marx's famous dictum, turned out to be first a farce and then a tragedy. The farce began soon enough, with the bureaucrats of the State questioning as one man the incumbent's moral authority to sit as Ombudsman, and the Lok Ayukta actually threatening to investigate the Dharma Mahamatra's land-grabbing activities; and it ended tragically when the usurper Nadendla Bhaskara Rao abolished

the office unceremoniously and sent the dignitary packing. NTR, after his return, has prudently not attempted a 'Third Coming'.

Soon after these forays against corruption, NTR set his sights wider. The previous Congress regime, as part of its *quid pro quo* culture, had granted permission for a large number of private engineering colleges ('donation colleges' as they are called in popular parlance), which collect capitation fees amounting to between Rs 25,000 and Rs one lakh from each student. The demand for them had been very vociferous from the propertied classes of coastal Andhra, who had all these years been sending their sons to far-off places in Karnataka to purchase their engineering education, thereby incurring an unpatriotic drain of Andhra wealth. In response to their demand, the Congress (I) government granted permission to 13 colleges in one year, and up they sprouted, one in Bapatla, one in Machilipatnam, two in Vijayawada, and so on all along the coast; and the expatriates set up colleges in Warangal, Hyderabad and Cuddapah outside the coastal districts. Now, the people who demanded, established, and profited both from the product and the enterprise of these 'donation colleges' are part of the core of NTR's class base, and they probably expected that he would not touch them. They did not reckon with the possibility that he would take his populism that far and actually threaten to take over the colleges and ban the collection of capitation fees, in the name of fighting commercialisation of education, which is exactly what he tried to do. But he soon discovered that it is one thing to fight the clerks, and quite another thing to ban donations to engineering colleges, especially if the educational entrepreneurs manning them happen to be 'our own men'. He had to finally cave in half way and allow them many concessions like the promise

of substantial financial grants, and the right to charge annual fees of Rs 5,000 *in lieu* of capitation fees, before he could affect his ban. Another comparable populist exploit was the attempt to impose an additional levy on rice-millers to obtain stocks for his scheme of supplying rice to the poor at Rs two a kg. The powerful lobby of rice-millers immediately went on strike, and reopened their shutters only after he granted them the fondest dream of rice-millers of Andhra: the permission to export a large part of the non-levy rice to neighbouring rice-hungry states like Tamil Nadu. He also tried (this was another much publicised measure) to impose restrictions on the price of food items sold in hotels and restaurants, to bring them within the reach of the 'common man'. The hoteliers, another powerful lobby, also closed their shops in protest, and could be persuaded to reopen them only after exempting the 'starred' hotels from the regulations, and allowing the others to sell two kinds of food; one they described as 'special', which was quality-wise the same as before, but now cost more; and the other which they contemptuously dubbed 'Telugu Desam meals' which was of very poor quality, and cost the regulation price.

These and other comparable actions of NTR must have made his class base a bit uncomfortable; not that they had lost anything but they certainly did not think it very amusing to have their own leader charge at them in unguarded moments. The most common comment heard from well-to-do people during the first months of NTR's rule was: 'One never knows what this man will do'. Nevertheless, they probably realised that if NTR is to stay in Hyderabad for long, such tilting at windmills must be suffered; for whatever political analysts may say about his film-glamour, in reality the people were not all that stupid.

But if these forays into by lanes were one thing, then NTR's fight with the Centre was another thing altogether. It does not matter how seriously he fought the Centre, what matters is that his class, his constituency, did not like the *principle* of confrontation with the Centre. What they wanted was a reshuffle and a new deal of the cards between them and the monopoly capitalist class, not a holy battle against centralisation of economic power. What they wanted was a bigger share of the national economic cake, and a suitable restructured model of the cake in the first place, not a rhetorical walk-out from the National Development Council. On this point, NTR was functioning at quite a different wavelength. It is not that the existing lopsided distribution of power between the Centre and the States hurt his democratic sentiments (he has none). One cannot understand the spirit of his opposition to Delhi in such modern and rational terms. Rather, what impels him is the sense - or nonsense - of the burden of historical and mythological tradition that continuously haunts him. In fighting Delhi, he probably sees himself as avenging the defeat of the Kakatiyas at the hands of the Sultan of Delhi Alauddin Khilji in the last years of the 13th century, an event that signifies, in the prevalent mythology of Andhra history, the beginning of the enslavement of the Telugu people by Delhi and its Deccan agents. The mundane concerns of the other chief ministers who walked out along with him from the National Development Council are as nothing to him. That is the reason why he has gone farthest in opposing the Centre among all the parties espousing the cause of federalism. To give him his due, his was the one electoral party that categorically condemned the army action in Punjab, not as a prudent afterthought as a consequence of the angry reaction of the Sikhs (the kind of electoral prudence that affected most of the

Opposition parties, from the Communists to the BJP), but on the very morrow of the army action.

It is here that he was out of tune with the section of the propertied classes of the State that perceived him as their man, the man they had brought to power. For them, this crusade was diversionary and a waste of time if it was only a verbal one, and if it was meant seriously, then it was very definitely bad business. It was not their business, at any rate. And the one man who constantly harped on this point inside the TDP was Nadendla Bhaskara Rao.

Bhaskara Rao has been painted in the Press as an unscrupulous man who has changed loyalties umpteen times in his ambition to become chief minister; he is an opportunist who split the TDP at the behest of the Congress (I) to further his own ends; he made brazen attempts to buy MLAs to join his camp; and he is a ruthless man who engineered a terrible communal situation in Hyderabad on September 9 to impose curfew on the city and somehow prevent NTR from coming back to power. He is certainly all this, but he is also the one man within the Telugu Desam Party who stood firm as a true representative of the interests of the classes that brought NTR to power. In the manner of any egoistical *neta*, he personalised this symbolism, and claimed that it is 'I who brought NTR into the party and it is I who led him to victory'. And the one point on which he stood fast, and which he never tired of telling anyone who would care to listen, was that this crusade against the Centre is 'bad business for us'. After he formed the breakaway faction of the party, it was 'no fight with the Centre' that he proclaimed as the one-point manifesto of his faction. He has insisted that it is this stand that represents the true interests of the Telugu people, and quite correctly, given what he means by 'the true interests of the Telugu people'.

For more than a year, in vain, he tried to persuade NTR to see this point, and failing in that job he took it upon himself to be history's filter that would filter out the deviant noise of federalist rhetoric. With kindly help from Indira Gandhi and her minions, he hoped to succeed, but history had one more trick up its sleeve.

There must be a lot of post-mortem soul-searching going on within the Congress (I) about who was primarily responsible for making a hash of the Andhra operation. Whatever the verdict, the fact stands that Ram Lal, then Governor of AP, was the instrument through which the mismanagement took place. He appears to have thought that toppling a government is as brazenly done as smuggling a timber truck past a Himalayan check-post. The consequence was a fierce public revulsion. By that time, in fact, many of the common people had lost much of their enthusiasm for NTR, and perhaps if the operation had been delayed by one year, NTR would have fallen under the weight of his own incongruity. This fact may surprise people living outside Andhra, who have been fed with the image of a prophet created for him by the kind of footloose democrat who goes around searching for a one-man alternative to Indira Gandhi; but it is true nevertheless. 'Incongruous' is the one word that strikes any observer of his manner and his politics, and his very apparel symbolises this. He sports the Shaivite *vibbuti* on his forehead, wears yellow-coloured silk robes like a Buddhist monk of a prosperous monastery, and created a sensation in the gossip columns by sporting a single earring in one ear, and letting it be known that he wears a woman's sari as his nightdress. (The last two, apparently, are some kind of tantric-inspired fads.)

The nature of the public revulsion is also quite instructive. It was in very few places that Telugu Desam leaders and cadre

themselves participated in the movement to restore NTR to power. Most of them have little love for him, and would have perhaps defected to Bhaskara Rao's side if they followed their inclinations. They resented his arrogant treatment of them; they resented the fact that he would not let them peacefully make one per cent of the wealth he had amassed in films; and they resented the organisational domination of NTR's two sons-in-law over the party. There was more than a grain of truth in Bhaskara Rao's lament that all the MLAs would jump to his side if NTR released them from his camp and set them free, except that it was not NTR, but the public revulsion that stayed their feet. And this goes for not only the MLAs but most of the party's leaders and cadre. Therefore, they all sat resolutely on the fence, determined to watch out the show. It was not they who fought for NTR's restoration, but the so-called cadre-based opposition parties, the Communists and the BJP, who had at long last found some work to do, and the outraged common people. It was the Communists in the coastal districts, and the BJP in Telangana that led the bandhs, the rallies and the hunger-strikes; and in Rayalaseema it was the common people who took spontaneously to the streets and protested violently against the dismissal of NTR. They selectively burnt and looted Central government property, and the houses of MLAs who had defected to Bhaskara Rao's side. Twenty-five persons were killed in police firings, 23 in the Rayalaseema districts and two on the outskirts of Hyderabad city.

III

Unlike Jesus Christ, who rose on the third day, NTR's resurrection took one full month. That month must have been a period of agony and chastisement for him. Here he was, a messiah of the Telugu people, created specially by the gods to

do noble deeds, forced to go around tending his fickle flock of 162 MLAs, exhibiting them to all and sundry and pleading that they *please* count the number and tell whether it was not more than half of 294. People were writing erudite articles about the Constitution and the role of the Governor, whereas as far as NTR could see, all that was needed was this little bit of arithmetic. But nobody would count them. Ram Lal, with the brazenness befitting an underworld operator, all but told him to go to hell, and got him arrested by the police; Zail Singh was more polite but instead of counting the number merely promised elliptically that he would do his best to save democracy (leaving NTR to guess whether that meant *he* would be saved); and the suave and much-lettered Shankar Dayal Sharma, who replaced Ram Lal as Governor of the State, pleaded for time and went to Tirupati to pray to the Lord. By this time NTR must have been a terribly frustrated man; here were 162 men and women, hard solid objective facts as any positivist could wish to see, and yet this slippery Brahmin at Raj Bhavan wanted the help of God to safeguard the Constitution and Democracy, whereas the most that he needed was an abacus to count them. This period of 'Constitutional crisis' in Andhra was in reality a very hilarious period, to those who could see the humour of it. Here was the most democratic and secular Constitution of the Third World, which could be saved only by God and 162 purchasable MLAs who had to be guarded at a summer resort against their own temptation.

In the end, it was neither God nor the Constitution that saved NTR, but the violent and sustained popular reaction, which successfully kept the defections down to a minimum, and Indira Gandhi's opportunist handling of the situation. She has perhaps set a record in successfully playing a 'heads-I-win-tails-you-lose game.' NTR fell when she willed, and he did not

rise again till she willed again - and he was made to see this humiliating fact. There has been much sensationalist speculation on the 'secret' agreement reached between him and Indira Gandhi, and many go-betweens have been suggested, including an ex-director of the CSIR. Whether any such definite agreement has been reached or not, the fact remains that NTR has been taught his lesson, and has been allowed to ascend to the throne once again only after being cut down to the size that suits not only Indira Gandhi but, more importantly, 'his own people'. Hereafter, or so they expect, he will stop his sabre-rattling and behave as a responsible broker in getting them better terms with the Centre. It is NTR's personal tragedy that he could replace Bhaskara Rao only by becoming a replacement for him.

EPW, 10.11.1984

Indira Gandhi: An Attempt at a Political Appraisal

Understanding of Indian reality by the Left has been seriously burdened by an ideological albatross, that is the notion that the Indian ruling class is morally required to *build* the nation, as against merely making wealth for itself. Ever since the celebrated Tryst that Nehru spoke of, Left analysts have been maintaining a balance sheet on behalf of the destiny, and periodically giving praise or bitter blame to the ruling classes according to the shape of the closing accounts. Some have even christened the ruling class the national bourgeoisie and have accepted its interests as the national consensus, its achievements as the nation's achievements, and its failures as the nation's failures. Others have not, but the peculiar prejudice that the ruling class *ought* to lead the country into its future remains strong with many on the Left. It is within this matrix that Nehru becomes many things from the proponent of a liberal modernism to the hero of the nation, and Indira Gandhi uniformly its Judas. He is the builder of the nation's cherished institutions and she the treacherous destroyer of that wealth.

It is perhaps time, now that we are well into the second generation of our post-colonial existence, to set our sights right, and there is no better occasion for this exercise than Indira Gandhi's death, for the event has brought out this attitude in all its shallowness. All manner of unlikely persons expressed shock and disbelief at the event and started counting their beads for the future of the nation. Whereas, certainly, of all

the ways in which she might have died, this has been the least unlikely for many years now, and it required no astrologer to say so, nor much dialectical cerebration for that matter.

I

No ruling class ever *builds* the nation except as a (not incidental but essential) by-product of the process of enriching itself. And its history, which willy-nilly becomes part of the core of the nation's history, is told not in terms of any presumed compact it has made with destiny, but in terms of the contradictions inherent in the process of enriching itself. And it is within this history that the role of any individual is to be located, and not in sententious moralisms of faith and betrayal.

To begin at the beginning, the first problem that the Indian ruling class faced after taking over power from the British was two-fold. One, to build a viable polity that would hold together the diverse sections of the ruling class, and would attract the loyalty of the masses; two, to build the industrial and infrastructural base required for their enrichment. All the answers they found to these problems had as their instrument the State. *Etatism*, it has been recognised, is a major aspect of post-colonial Indian reality. Functioning as the mobiliser, the deficit creator, and the distributor of surplus wealth, the State has created the industrial and infrastructural base for enriching the propertied classes through import-substituting manufacture and technologically modernised agriculture. It has spread its tentacles far and wide and provides to the industrial entrepreneur a painless source of Capital; it is painless in many senses. State capital undertakes all the unprofitable investment in basic and infrastructural industries and supplies most of the products cheap to him; to undertake the investment it robs the poor and cadges on imperialism without taxing him too

painfully; it does not demand as a pre-condition that he cut off his debilitating links with imperialism (indeed the State itself is heavily dependent on foreign capital); and finally the State finances much of his enterprise through loans of public financial institutions without asking for a commensurate say in the running of the enterprise, a peculiar *etatist* fraud on the public that the Bombay High Court has recently declared to be not only proper but inviolable to boot in its judgment in the Swaraj Paul case.

To the rural gentry the State is equally munificent. The story of agrarian change in India since 1947 is quite complex. But the essential point is that with the abolition of *jagirs* and hereditary *watans* and the threat (more than the implementation) of tenancy reforms, the Indian village gradually settled down to its post-colonial shape. Some of the landlords hastily disposed of their land, but the recipients and the remnants, together with the bigger of the ex-tenants, soon settled down to coalesce into a very heterogeneous class of landlords. The State has helped the further development of the contours of this class. It has seen to it that no land-ceiling laws touch them except to impel them to sell off the less profitable of their acres; it has undertaken the infrastructural investment in irrigation and rural electrification to prepare the ground for the technological modernisation of this class; it has compensated for what they lost in social authority (as a consequence of the process of democratisation of rural India unleashed by peasant movements) by putting in their hands the financial and administrative paraphernalia of development (rural banks and co-operatives, panchayat raj institutions, etc); it has promptly dispatched the police and the paramilitary to their aid whenever their tenants or *bataidars* or labourers rebelled; and by and by it begged and borrowed from

imperialism on their behalf and provided them with Green Revolution technology; it did all this without demanding that they give up their old habits of domination and old methods of exploitation; indeed, it has reinforced these habits by reaching down to the gentry and strengthening their hands by putting itself at their disposal; where an enterprising rich peasantry has developed, it has soon enough acquired the habits and the culture of this gentry. It is a wrong notion that rural India is described as semi-feudal because there has not been enough change; it is semi-feudal also *because* of the nature of such change as has been there.

In this process, the State has turned out to be the single biggest Capitalist in India, with a single public institution like the LIC possessing assets worth five times that of the largest family of Indian monopolists. This State is simultaneously a parasite on society and an object for the parasitism of the propertied classes. Their wealth is deficient in that prime quality of genuine Capital, an autonomous capacity for self-expansion; instead, it can expand only on the condition that the State allows it and helps it to expand. Not all the brave postures of shackled initiative that they are putting on these days can obscure this fact. This situation is well described by the Maoist concept of *bureaucrat* capital, but Indian analysts have unfortunately vulgarised that expression to mean the capital employed in the public sector. Indian capital, as such, is bureaucrat, that is to say it is a parasite on the State.

This is the State in one aspect, the State *vis-a-vis* the propertied classes. In its other aspect, the State has created the network of patronage that is the only real thread (the rest being illusory) that links the loyalty of the masses to the ruling classes. It is through the State that the ruling classes enrich themselves and it is through the State that they lay claim to the loyalty of

the masses. Unlike early American ideology, which admired its pushing capitalists, Indian ideology does not even pretend to love its capitalists and landlords. If any obscure *Harijan* or tribal ever expresses sentiments of loyalty to the system, that is only on the ground that 'it is the *sarkar* that gave me my pair of bullocks'; or half an acre of barely cultivable land, or whatever has been his lot.

Built around this structure is an ideology, whose components are socialism, self-reliance, modernisation, liberal democracy, secularism, and anti-imperialism. State enterprise is identified with socialism, import substitution with self-reliance, fertilisers with modernisation, votes with liberal democracy, multilateral communalism with secularism, and the ability to play the USSR against the US with anti-imperialism. It is difficult to decide to what extent this ideology was genuine, in the sense of a false belief that is not *felt* to be false; perhaps, among many of the Left intellectuals who worked the hardest at its legitimisation, it *was* genuine, but among the rulers themselves it probably never was. However, what is germane is that this structure and its ideology did have a certain capacity for achievement. A heavy industrial base was built and the capitalist class was enabled to accumulate and transform itself into its role as an industrial comprador class, the late imperialist counterpart of the trading comprador class of the colonial era. Irrigation projects were undertaken and the ground was partially cleared for the Green Revolution. Throughout the fifties and up to the mid-sixties the economy, and agricultural production as part of it, maintained a steady rate of growth, even at a rather low rate of investment. Capital and technology aid from the imperialists flowed optimistically into the country. And the value of the rupee remained steady. The people were kept patriotic and quiescent (which mean the same thing) by

the distribution of 5 per cent of patronage and 95 per cent of expectations. The sheer size of the country and its undoubted cultural and material potential made its voice heard in the international arena; and the same factors also made the various sections of the propertied classes wait for their turn in expectation without indulging in too much of unseemly squabbling. True, they often played their dirty games, but not without a certain sense of shame. In a word all was, or seemed to be, well with the country. Only Kashmir and the North-East gave some trouble but this was not a consequence of the internal political economy of the land but was a legacy of the transfer of power from the British, and there was little protest in the land when unethical and brutal measures were employed to tackle these troubles.

At the risk of being taken to be deliberately provocative, it must be said that it was Nehru's good fortune that he ruled the country in this period. It is doubtful that an impartial history will judge Nehru to have been a great man. In history, the eminence of an individual is impossible to separate from the eminence of the Class he represents, and the eminence of a class can only be decided in terms of its urge to push to the maximum extent the limits of its objective possibilities. The Indian ruling class, even in the first decade and a half when it had some genuine achievements to its credit, exhibited no such urge. Like a petty *dalal*, it was content to balance its register each evening. But this is an aside.

II

It would be a vulgar (in the sense of non-dialectical) exercise to search for any date at which this peace was shattered. A social system should not be imaged by a tank that gets filled slowly up to its potential and then breaches one fine day. A

social system has no predetermined boundaries, but only internal contradictions that explore and shape the boundaries as they work themselves out; the system discovers and simultaneously exposes its limitations as it develops itself. Sometimes it realises its limitations by taking an extravagant jump and crashing into them. The Indian Green Revolution is a case in point.

It is generally agreed that the crisis of the system that was structured in the fifties started becoming apparent since the mid-sixties. The thesis of a secular deceleration of the Indian economy has been controverted, but the period from the mid-sixties till the proclamation of the Emergency was a bad period for the economy. The growth of national income decelerated, the rate of investment dropped, the value of the rupee started falling steadily, there were two years of drought followed by recession, and the foreigners were less forthcoming with aid. During the seventies, there was much analysis of this gloomy picture. Most of the analysts focused attention on the *etatist* nature of the polity, or what is more properly described as the bureaucrat nature of Indian capital, and therefore sought answers in an analysis of the inability of the State to invest sufficient amounts of capital in a sufficiently rational manner. The answers obtained have varied over the years both in their politics and in the degree of optimism. In the beginning, they were pessimistic and focused on class factors like massive poverty that severely constricts the internal market, or the consumer goods orientation of the sizable private sector that immobilises precious capital, or the backward and unproductive nature of the subsidised and poorly taxed rural rich, and so on. But recently, given that the rate of investment has reached respectable levels and the economy is not only back to the 4 per cent rate of growth but has acquired a perceptibly modern

pigmentation to boot, the answers tend to be less pessimistic and less political, focusing on structural inefficiencies and bottlenecks. For my purpose, which is a political analysis of the developments that made Indira Gandhi, it is not very important to know which of these is the correct answer, or to be alarmed at the prospect of the deluge that is yet to come. Indeed, most of these answers are not answers but merely reformulations of the question in concrete economic terms.

At a very broad level, the cause of the crisis is that an economy that exhibits semi-feudal relations of exploitation over a large area and is dominated by a dependent bureaucrat capital, is incapable of developing rapidly and rationally. But to acknowledge this cause does not by itself suffice to explain the din and the bustle, the humour and the devilry, of Indian politics. The principal contradiction posits an abstract crisis; it is the logic of all the *real* crisis that it manifests itself in. In the course of the constrained activity of real human beings, it takes the phenomenal form of a series of real crisis, each of which is potentially the last crisis, but none of which is pre-ordained to be absolutely the last crisis. The nature and course of these real crisis cannot be determined *a priori*, once and for all, they cannot be predicted by the principal contraction, but have to be followed up by an analysis of the social activity of the various classes. Moreover, the crisis posited by the principal contradiction, being the abstract and overall crisis, is a crisis that focuses on failure, on the inability of the system to withstand its history. But no system ever slides linearly down into failure. Rather, the sequence of *real* crisis within this crisis of failure are crisis of success that get entangled in the contradictions of the system and either get resolved and lift the system to a new plateau or end in the final breakdown of the system. Every living organism must ultimately die. The

contradiction between life and death, between growth and decay, must end in death and in decay. But no organism merely decays to its death. Its life is a series of crisis, each of which is a crisis of growth that gets caught in its own contradictions. It is when Marxists do not realise this that they sound apocalyptic, and boringly so. It is the successes within the failure, the development within the underdevelopment, the 'crisis within the crisis', that constitute the stuff of the dynamics of a society.

What started in the mid-sixties was the first real crisis in which the principal contradiction of the Indian political economy manifested itself. In the first decade after the takeover of power from the British, a certain structure was built and a certain set of relations among the various sections of the propertied classes, between the State and those classes, and between the working masses and those classes, were determined. This structure was the form through which the productive forces were to be developed. It had a successful first innings, and the productive forces did develop up to a point. But starting with the mid-sixties the newly unleashed productive forces came to clash with the structure; with the ambitious jump forward taken through the Green Revolution, the clash became a head-on collision. This 'crisis within the crisis' unleashed class conflicts in various forms. The working masses themselves, both consciously and unconsciously, perceived the crisis to be that of the overall system and rebelled against it; but the propertied classes, with their historical myopia, mistook the phenomenon for the essence and demanded a realignment of the structure, a redefinition of the relations of the propertied classes *vis-a-vis* each other, *vis-a-vis* the State and *vis-a-vis* the nation's wealth. Whereas the people asked for an end to the system of exploitation, the propertied classes wanted to scrap the Industrial Policy Resolution and

the Agricultural Prices Commission. The crisis and reactions to it are best studied through three points of tension, corresponding to the three principal class-groupings of the country, the monopoly capitalist class and the big bourgeoisie in general; the rural gentry and the closely linked provincial small bourgeoisie; and the mass of the working people, both urban and rural.

The first is linked with what some analysts have identified as the distinction between the early and the late phases of import-substitution. The early phase is the easy phase where local capital manages to displace imperialism in the manufacture of the (by then) traditional varieties of consumer goods, including (as in the case of a relatively strong capitalist class like that of India) consumer durables like motor cars. The late and difficult phase comes with the 'ambitious' desire to go in for the manufacture of more sophisticated designs and of capital goods. The attempt at import-substitution in this phase becomes so difficult that the illusion of self-reliance is torn away and it stands out as the essentially comprador relation that it is. To take the most obvious instance, during the first phase the Fiat car gets slowly indigenised through Premier India, but in the second phase Maruti is merely an auspicious Hindu prefix for the Japanese Suzuki. But what is important here is that there is no god-given or genuine technological obstacle to self-reliant transformation to the second phase. What is involved is that in the first phase the capitalist class (including the State) takes the bother to replace imperialist capital to some extent in its eagerness to convert itself into an industrial class, but once it has acquired a blast furnace of its own then it is content to accumulate comprador capital on that basis. If some Left intellectuals mistook the first phase for anti-imperialist national-bourgeois development then that is entirely their private illusion.

This transition creates serious crises of all varieties. Self-reliance now becomes a shibboleth and a worn-out cliché. The scions and the paid hacks of the monopoly houses write stringent articles in the glossy periodicals that have come up in this period, deriding the outdated ‘ideological’ and unpragmatic notion of self-reliance. The public sector bureaucrat behaves with equal vehemence in rejecting ‘ideology’. *Etatism* of the fifties too comes under attack. It is not that Capital has now ceased to be bureaucrat, but it merely wants a redefinition of the terms of the *etatism*. The State, which was earlier relegated the duty of doing the heavy work of building an industrial base without thinking of profit, is now required to function more efficiently and to concentrate less on enterprise and more on finance, and on aid and technology brokerage with the imperialists. The State as entrepreneur therefore comes in for all manner of taunts and jibes, much to the irritation of the Nehruite Leftist who had taught himself to worship it as the womb of Indian socialism. But the Nehruite does have a point: it is astonishing how brazenly the champions of a class that cannot manufacture a lube of toothpaste efficiently, attack the public sector for not running the Railways on schedule. But the poor Nehruite is alone in his chagrin. Even within his cherished public sector, the fashionable trend is for giving up ‘ideology’ and accepting ‘accountability’, which is an ideological notion meaning profitability. Altogether, a vociferous demand for the opening up of the economy and the privatisation of the public sector piles up.

The second point of tension is the Green Revolution. Whether the Green Revolution has had any impact on Indian agriculture is a much-debated question. The answer depends upon how one defines the term and what measure of its impact one uses. If it is defined as the employment of HYV seeds

and the attendant technology, and if its impact is measured by the increase in per-acre productivity, then the accepted answer has been that it has had no impact outside of Punjab and Haryana. But it is not clear why anyone other than the Planning Commission would be interested in such a narrow and distorted definition of the problem. If we define it broadly to mean agricultural modernisation that was initiated in the fifties through irrigation projects, rural co-operatives and rural electrification and culminated in the widespread use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and HYV seeds, and if we measure its impact, not by the imputed objective of increasing all-round productivity but the real objective of further enriching the rural rich, then the success has been quite significant. And if we distance ourselves further from the empiricism of statistical analysis by reckoning its success in terms of the appetite it has aroused in the rural rich (which is extremely relevant for political analysis), then its success has been quite phenomenal. Indeed, the fact that it has aroused considerable appetite that it cannot satisfy is the point where the contradiction between the development of the productive forces in agriculture and the way the economy has been structured (the crisis within the crisis) stands revealed. The fact of this incapacity of the system to keep its promises has gradually dawned on the rural gentry over the last ten to fifteen years. And given the capacity of this class to mobilise the rich and middle peasantry behind it, and given the close - though not necessarily amiable - connections it has with the provincial trader, entrepreneur, and professional class through ties of blood and commerce, the disaffection has rebounded with a resonance. If the resonance has not always been very loud, that is because the propertied classes of India are scared of airing their grievances too loudly for fear of setting a bad example. But it has certainly made itself heard in the rapid

decay of the political structure and the cultural ethos of the ruling classes. By about the mid-seventies, the Indian State was faced with the disquieting prospect of the propertied classes turning unpatriotic. From Khalistan to the Shetkari Sanghatana to the Telugu Desam Party, the avowed ideals and the methods and the degree of disloyalty have varied immensely, but the disaffection is quite real.

The third point of tension needs no elaborate charting. The loyalty of the broad masses of the working people rested on the illusory basis of fat promises, and the thin real basis of State patronage, and both of them soon evaporated. It is to the credit of the Communists that even if they were initially duped by the illusion, they were at least the first to reflect the disillusionment. The split in the CPI in 1964 was essentially a consequence of this re-evaluation of the ruling class and the polity, and had nothing of essence to do with the youthful delinquencies of Dange or the Sino-Soviet dispute. Added to this disillusionment were two other factors: the misery caused by the deepening economic crisis, and the fact that as State patronage to the rural rich increased, they became more and more oppressive. At the next step, it was Naxalbari that made this break resoundingly clear. Since that time there have been widespread revolts of the rural poor in the plains and the tribals in the forests. Whereas the struggles in the plains have invariably been led by militant Left organisations, the tribal struggles have found a variety of leaders, including avowed Gandhians. The only reason one can see is that 'development' has devastated the lives of the tribals so much that almost any politics will be forced into struggles once it enters their midst. The average forest-dweller today consumes perhaps half of what his forefathers half a century ago did, and that is the stark truth.

III

It was not ordained anywhere that Lal Bahadur Shastri should die prematurely, nor that the Congress Old Guard should make a hash of the succession. In this sense (and only in this sense) it was an accident that Indira Gandhi was called upon to preside over this crisis more or less since its inception. Nothing else about her actions or her personality was accidental.

Indira Gandhi's career as Prime Minister is easily divided into two periods: the first is the period from her accession till the defeat at the hands of the Janata Party in 1977. The second in the period from her return to power in 1980, till her death. This most obvious division is also the objective division, the line drawn by the objective historical process. In the first period, it was the economic crisis and the disaffection of the masses that were the main problems. The disaffection of the propertied classes was as yet very much incipient. Indeed, it was the Green Revolution and the further industrialisation of the economy that were undertaken in this period, with imperialist aid and advice, as an answer to the economic crisis that would intensify and bring out the disaffection, even as they gave the polity the pigmentation of an industrial economy. But that was as yet in the future. For the present, none of the major political changes of the period was a consequence of a struggle within the ruling classes. Even the split in the Congress was no exception. It was the answer to two vital needs of the polity in the context of the economic crisis and the mass disaffection as indicated by Naxalbari and the poor performance of the Congress in the 1967 elections. The needs were that the State should tighten its reins further, and that it should turn populist. Indira Gandhi's manipulations achieved both aims. The successful war with Pakistan was an external factor that helped the process, but

while it was an external factor, it was by no means an accidental godsend. Both the tightening of the reins of the State and the adoption of populist postures required greater reliance on the Soviet Union, and that closeness was certainly an important factor in the Bangladesh war. Not only did Indira Gandhi achieve these immediate aims, in a matter of half a decade she was quite successful in containing mass disaffection, and it appears now that she was even successful in pulling the economy out of the deceleration crisis. The tribal and peasant revolts in Naxalbari, Srikakulam and Bihar were brutally suppressed, and so were the more heterogeneous and essentially petty-bourgeois uprisings in Bihar and Gujarat. A suspension of the Parliamentary democratic process was required to fulfil these objectives, and she suspended it without hesitation through the Emergency. A suspension of civil liberties was required, and she suspended them through MISA, through the widespread use of the Disturbed Areas Act in Andhra, and through the employment of murderous hoodlums in the streets of Calcutta. Brutal measures were called for, and brutal measures were adopted. More than a thousand persons were killed in the process in police firings and in faked 'encounters' in this period.

As I said above, the disaffection of the propertied classes was very much incipient in the first period. They were only in this period beginning to experience the fact that the structure of yesterday was becoming a hindrance. At this stage, it was the objective duty of Indira Gandhi that she should stand by the structure; and since the structure was *etatist* and the disaffection came from the wealthy, this necessity merged neatly with the populism demanded for other reasons, and resulted in her fiercely anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist and anti-landlord postures. There were further bouts of land reform laws, and

pieces of legislation like FERA and MRTP Act, which are all to be understood both from the angle of populism and the need to preserve the specific structure of the polity against the incubatory disaffection of the rich, who wanted a different alignment of the structure. She herself never had any convictions other than the determination to do her job.

In the process of this more or less successful management of the crisis, many old values and habits and norms were upset. Cheating, double-dealing and falsehood entered the politics of the ruling classes in a big way. Left analysts, taking the cue from her bourgeois opponents, have irrationally blamed Indira Gandhi for this debasement. In reality, she was merely the most brazen exponent (this much must be granted to her personal critics) of the ethos of the period, which continues down to our day. The propertied classes are losing faith in their system and consequently their culture has been degenerating at a steady pace, and nobody and no sphere of life has been exempted from the taint. Well-meaning intellectuals - including quite a few Left intellectuals, who continue to exhibit an anachronistic nationalism as if this is still the 1930s - bewail this as the degeneration of 'our' culture, but it is not 'our' culture that is degenerating. For, parallelly, there has been a remarkable regeneration of people's culture across the land, taking a variety of organisational forms, some militant Left and some vaguely progressive. It appears that when the people become unpatriotic they turn creative, but when propertied classes become unpatriotic they turn vulgar. And the more public the form of social consciousness the more blatant the vulgarity it exhibits. Since politics, the theatre and religion are the three most public of all the forms of social consciousness, it is in these spheres that the vulgarity of the ruling classes has been most evident. Small wonder that soon enough film stars, *babas* and political leaders started keeping happy company.

But this is anticipating. To get back to the narrative, the lifting of the Emergency revealed two disturbing facts. One, that the people's disaffection had by no means been suppressed, and two, that the disaffection of the propertied classes had burst out of the womb. The period since the lifting of the Emergency till today has seen popular struggles that are widespread, militant and better organised than the struggles of the pre-Emergency period; and it has also seen a new phenomenon: quite open squabbling within the propertied classes, often taking mass forms that have confused the Left very badly. The propertied classes, from the monopoly capitalist class down to the small town commercial bourgeoisie and the rural gentry, are gearing for a realignment of the structure, a redefinition of its parameters, a solution to the 'crisis within the crisis', and they are also fighting among themselves because each one of them hopes to be in, or at least close to, the driver's seat when the new alignment takes shape. The best place to look for evidence of this phenomenon is the political and cultural superstructure. It is unfortunate that Marxist analysts, having taught themselves that the economy is primary, look for evidence of change in economic indices, as if history is written by regression equations. (Too many Marxist intellectuals being economists has been bad for Indian politics.) In times of class struggle - including intra-class struggle - it is the superstructure that becomes lively. When the drabest hacks who write centre-page articles in the daily Press start producing scintillating prose, then that is a sure enough sign that something is cooking. (As a very recent example, the panic caused among the Indian monopolists by Swaraj Paul produced the best pieces of invective written by their scribes.)

The inability of the Janata Party to hold together is merely the inability of any one of these contending classes to take

charge of the affairs and settle the 'crisis within the crisis' in its favour. In that period, the greatest fear of the urban bourgeoisie was that the rural gentry would take the lead. The fear received its justification in the aggressiveness of the gentry, which revealed itself in the open and uninhibited attacks on 'urban-oriented Nehruism' as well as the ruthlessness with which they mobilised their caste-fellows to assault the agricultural labourers in the Hindi States. In turn, the fear of the urban bourgeoisie is evidenced by nothing better than the savageness with which their normally staid Press (which is usually called the National Press) attacked Charan Singh. He has certainly been the most maligned of all Indian politicians. He is known to be incorruptible, an able administrator, and certainly he is the only bourgeois politician after Nehru with a well worked out and viable economic philosophy of his own. Indeed, in this matter he is perhaps a cut above Nehru, since he is his own Mahalanobis. And yet, he has been the target of savage attacks as an obscurantist (which he is not) and an opportunist (which they all are), especially during the short period when he was 'interim' Prime Minister of the country, by the grace of Sanjeeva Reddy, another *kisan*, as the gentry like to describe themselves.

Their own inability to settle the issue scared the ruling classes so much that they started looking for a saviour who would hold things together with a whip in the hand; within the confines of Parliamentary politics there was only one such saviour: Indira Gandhi. And the imperialists, both of the East and the West, were equally keen to put an end to the 'anarchy'. They knew well that however the structure was realigned it would continue to be comprador; what they wanted was a quick resolution one way or the other, or at least stability. These reasons themselves do not explain why Indira Gandhi was voted

back to power in 1980, but it is certain that if she had not been, and if the vote had not put an end to the anarchy, some other - and not necessarily constitutional - way out would have been found.

However, Indira Gandhi in her second innings was not the same as before. It is not that she had aged, but the conditions had changed. The people she could handle. She knew how to get their votes and she knew how to get them killed. She handled them in this period as in the first. She broke the back of the textile workers of Bombay, and she broke the heads of the rebellious tribals in Central India and the agrarian poor in Bihar and in Andhra. But the squabbling of the propertied classes was something she could not handle. The same squabbling that brought down the Janata Party now shifted into her party and took the form of the peculiar Congress phenomenon: Dissidence. After all, the change in government had not resolved the crisis; it had merely set up a new medium for its expression. And she did not know what to do. She threw out leaders, broke up Cabinets, dissolved Assemblies, and in desperation cried 'off with his head!' like another paranoid Queen. But nothing worked. Even less did she know what to do when the crisis took the form of new messiahs and mass movements outside of her party. She manoeuvred and she manipulated, she conferred and she dilly-dallied, she lied and she cheated, she sent in the army and she killed, but she could never come to terms with the phenomenon. Some of the squabbling classes she could satisfy to some extent. The devaluation of the public sector and the opening up of the economy are two stark shifts that she initiated as soon as she came back to power, and this has gone down well with most sections of the ruling classes, particularly the urban capitalists. As the *Indian Express* said editorially (March

5): “There is a consensus today that the economy needs to be opened up”. From the fiery radical of the early seventies she was now the mature leader, who had no faith in ‘isms’, as the cliché goes. Indeed the change was already perceptible in the Emergency period when she allowed her younger son to slap her Communist fellow-travellers in the face, and she herself frequently talked of an ‘Indian road’, neither capitalist nor socialist, and contemptuously asked the Communists what they had achieved. But the change really got going after 1980. In this regard, the ‘national consensus’ of the fifties stands destroyed; but this change is no full resolution of the ‘crisis within the crisis’, as the same editorial goes on to lament, for a new national consensus of the exploiting classes has yet to emerge. The heterogeneity of the Indian exploiting classes makes this necessary if the system is to get over its first crisis and move on to a higher plateau. And her failure to achieve the consensus, her failure to structure a new alignment of the relations of these classes that would once again win the system their loyalty, and once again set the proactive forces moving forward, in a word, her failure to provide room for the chickens of development that have come home to roost, was the failure of her career. It was this failure that finished her. One crisis after another led her down the ladder. Assam confused her, Andhra confounded her and Punjab killed her.

IV

By the time of her death, she had completed the destruction of the ideological overgrowth of the system. There is no more talk of socialism, which is declared to be alternatively un-Indian and outdated; as for land reforms, there is no more land to be distributed, as everybody knows; secularism she laid bare by making it a point to visit every temple, every dargah, every church and every gurdwara she found on her way, and

even more blatantly by inciting Hindu communalism in Jammu and Muslim communalism in Assam; liberal democracy was buried by the forced charade of elections in Assam, and the incredibly undemocratic Terrorist Affected Areas Act, following upon the massacre in Amritsar (parenthetically, it is the final sign of the demise of the liberal intelligentsia of this land that such an Act is allowed to govern 15 million Punjabis without more than a murmur of protest elsewhere); anti-imperialism is a virtue that she herself regarded with a certain amount of contempt in her last days, though Moscow and its fellow-travellers continued to credit her with it.

This is what makes her son's task that much more difficult. The twin problems his mother faced remain before him. The disillusionment of the people with the system is by now complete. They talk of it with nothing but contempt even as they queue up to vote. And the urgent need for a new national consensus of the exploiting classes is still to be satisfied. The first has no solution other than brute power, for populism has reached the point of nil marginal credibility. It will succeed so long as the armed might of the State (with the help of the Soviets and also the Americans if need be) is superior to the collective strength of the masses. Once that point is passed, then that is that and there is nothing more to be done except sing requiem for the dead.

But the second problem is susceptible of less tragic solutions, provided the right instruments can be devised, for all the instruments wrought in the past are in shambles today. Whether Rajiv Gandhi is capable of fabricating and using them is a moot point. Till now, his main asset has been the fact that Indian politicians, like race horses, are initially judged by their pedigree and only later by their track record. His pedigree is unexceptionable but such track record as is available to date

can cause no joy to those who want to save the 'nation' from chaos. His election speeches have been characterised by a wooden monotony that stands in sharp contrast to the finesse demanded by the problem he faces. To put it in the language of 'Scientific Management' that he and his cronies are said to be partial to, the variables are too many, the constraints are too complex, the feasibility region is disconnected and the objective is unclear. It will require much more than a bright-eyed admiration for computers to handle the crisis. Whether he can succeed is the problem of the propertied classes, but if he fails, that can create quite serious problems for the masses.

EPW, 23.03.1985

Karamchedu Killings : The Essence of the NTR Phenomenon

“He who sets his heart on Lord Krishna and thinks of him steadfastly gets as much benefit as from an *Aswametha Yajna*; he who does *pranam* to Lord Krishna verily gets ten times the benefit...” Thus, a honeyed Brahmin’s voice blaring from the loudspeaker fitted to the top of a two-storeyed building in the village of Karamchedu. Just beneath the loudspeaker is a painted board which says that the top storey of the building - or a part of it - houses a *Lakshmi mandiram* and the picture rises before your mind’s eye of devout housewives of caste-Hindu landed families sitting cross-legged on the floor nodding their heads in appreciation as the Brahmin goes on to say that “one should hear the secrets of the Gita from a man born to noble *samskaras*, and one understands the message according the *samskaras* of one’s birth”.

The day is Monday, July 22, 1985. Just five days earlier, a 3,000-strong mob of caste-Hindu (Kamma, to be precise) landholders of the village had assaulted the Madigas (Chamars) *en masse* and killed six men and raped three girls. As the Gita *pathan* goes on in the *Lakshmi mandiram*, barely 20 of the 300 Madiga families are in the village. The others have fled the village, to look after the injured in the hospitals at Chirala or Guntur; or to seek refuge in a Church compound in Chirala. The walls of the Church say “Come unto Me” in bold letters; they came unto Him (in part because most of the Madigas are Christians, and in part because He is in possession of the most

durable structure in Chirala), but He has given them no better shelter than the shade of a couple of mango trees, which can keep neither the sun nor the rain out.

Karamchedu is a big and prosperous village of Prakasam district in coastal Andhra. The coastal villages of this district are major cultivators of cotton and tobacco, and Karamchedu is one of them. The attendant prosperity is evident in the well-built (and no longer shoddy as of yore but quite slick-looking) buildings with TV antennae sticking out from the top, and the substantial number of scooters, motorcycles, tractors, and even an odd car that slush through the muddy streets.

Most of this wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few Kamma landlord families; one of them, Daggubati Chenchuramaiah, being none less than the father of NTR's son-in-law and leader of Telugu Desam's youth wing, Venkateswara Rao. Among the others are well known film producers, not to mention lesser operators of the film business. While not all the Kammammas in the village are rich, the fact that their community is about 6,000 strong in a village of 10,000 people has given the dominant sections of the community tremendous power. And they appear to have put it to good use. The stronghold they have over this prosperous and 'developed' looking village is remarkable. The Madigas and Malas (the two major *Harijan* castes of Andhra) of the village, numbering about 450 households, live in conditions reminiscent of the helot age of ancient India. Most of them own no land (just 16 of the 300 Madiga families possess land, and that too just about half an acre), and depend entirely upon leasing in or labouring upon the land of the peasants or landlords. Those who lease in land are forced to perform chores in the landlord's fields or house, in addition to paying the rent. The annual farm-servant (*paleru*) is paid about Rs 2,000; if he is unable to

complete the full year's work for which he has contracted, he is forced to quit without being paid a single *paisa*. Absenting himself for one day would entail being beaten and manhandled. In the words of Tella Judson, a Madiga of the village, "a *paleru* who has worked all the year cannot be sure of getting his payment until the last month is through, and the crop is harvested and deposited in the landlord's granary". The payment for daily wage-labour is also surprisingly low by coastal Andhra standards. The men are paid about Rs 10 to 12 and the women Rs 6 to 8.

The *Harijans* do not appear to have received much help in resisting this domination. The Left in coastal Andhra has generally been more popular among the propertied classes (especially in the villages), leaving the *Harijans* to the Christian missionaries, and the politics of patronage perfected by the Congress. Indeed, caste-wise it is Kamma gentry and peasantry that has shown a general preference for the Left, especially the CPI (M); the fact that one important reason for this partiality is the very patronage that the Congress has afforded the *Harijans* is a shameful commentary on Left politics, but is nevertheless an undeniable truth. The other important factor is that in the choice of leadership the Congress has shown a general aversion towards giving the leading role to coherent and well organised landed communities settled in prosperous and fertile regions, and has preferred to give a disproportionate importance to decrepit and unorganised sections of the gentry, or economically powerful sections of the backward communities. This was the only viable policy for holding the immensely varied sections of this country's propertied classes together; for if the political lead had been allowed to economically powerful communities, that would have resulted in what our newspaper editors call 'fissiparous tendencies', to the fatal detriment of

the unity of the ruling classes so essential for their survival. Indira Gandhi - perhaps more than her father - was an expert in handling this stratagem. But the incongruity inherent in such a tactic was not in line with the party's Green Revolution economics which gave more and more prosperity to precisely those who felt they were being denied their fair share of political power. And their ranks were strengthened by the rise of new sections and a new generation enriched by the Green Revolution and all that it has entailed, and who have little loyalty and lots of impatience with the structure of the past. The Congress Party's ambition to technologically modernise the country without altering the political structure suitably has now caught up with it, and it is paying for its folly all over the country at the cost of considerable bloodshed. With the rise of the Telugu Desam Party, this incongruous distance of the prosperous sections of the gentry and their new-rich fellow-travellers from the seats of political power has been bridged; it implies, of course, short-sighted self-assertion which is inimical to what Rajiv Gandhi and his late mother like to call 'national integrity' (which is properly understood as the unity and integrity of the propertied classes) but that is not our concern right now.

What is of moment is that it implies more violence on the rural poor. It is a matter of historical accident (for these forces of arrogant self-assertion are present as much within the Congress as outside of it) that the violence takes the form of electoral conflict, with the landed classes backing the Telugu Desam and its allies (CPI, CPI (M), BJP, etc) and the *Harijans*, the Congress (I). Small wonder then that the national opposition parties (we call them 'friendly opposition parties' in Andhra) have been maintaining a shamefaced inactivity in the face of these assaults, while the Congress (I) is extracting

maximum propaganda mileage as the blood flows. Karamchedu is only the last of a series of incidents. The very first elections that brought the Telugu Desam to power in 1983 saw the burning of *Harijans* at Padirikuppam in Chittoor district. Four persons were killed and about 80 houses gutted; property worth Rs 6 lakh was destroyed. In this year's Assembly elections, the assaults became more widespread, though less fatal. According to Press reports, assaults took place on Harijans at Muthukur, Veerareddypalem, Brahmanatangel and Vadamalapeta in Chittoor district; Dharur, Chilapur and Alampalli in Rangareddy district; and Venkatakrishnapuram and Cheemalamarri in Guntur district. As at Padirikuppam, the attacks took the form of house-burning. *Harijan* houses burn easily, especially if it is the summer months. Thirty houses were burnt and 71 persons hospitalised, but mercifully no one died. Oddly enough, while we do not know how many of the landed classes were arrested, 60 *Harijans* were taken into custody for rioting. And just in case somebody thinks it is only the Kamma gentry that has gained moral strength from the accession of NTR to power, let it be recorded that at Padirikuppam the arsonists were Naidus, and in the Rangareddy villages they were Reddys - which happen to be the dominant landed castes of the respective areas.

Now it is Karamchedu, and with an unprecedented degree of brutality. There was trouble in the village during the recent Assembly elections, with the *Harijans* defying the landlords and voting for the Congress (I). That conflict merely added some more heat to the cauldron. On July 16 there took place an incident that set off the explosion. There are two drinking water tanks in the village, one for the *Harijans* and one for the caste-Hindus. At about 4 o'clock in the evening of July 16, Kamma youth by name Srinivasa Rao was feeding bran to his

buffalo near the *Harijans'* tank. Some of the bran dribbled down into the tank. A Madiga woman by name Suvarta, who had come to fetch water, objected to it, and there was an altercation. Srinivasa Rao took out the thickly plaited rope used for beating buffaloes, and beat Suvarta with it. The girl is said to have grabbed at the rope and beaten him in turn. Some more people joined issue on both sides but the quarrel was soon settled. That night the Kamma youth came to Suvarta's house and dragged her out. But the neighbouring women interceded and sent away the youth. The *Harijans* thought the issue was closed, and therefore did not anticipate what happened the next day.

That night the Kamma youth gathered at a brandy shop in the village and took a decision to attack the Madigas (the other *Harijan* caste, the Malas, were deliberately spared). Their fellow-caste men from neighbouring villages were mobilised through openly communal and provocative slogans ("If you are born to a Kamma you come out, if you are born to a Madiga, then don't"). A mob of 2,000 to 3,000 then gathered in tractors and motorcycles and surrounded the Madiga houses from all sides. The surprised Madigas ran for life. Some ran into houses, some hid under haystacks, and some ran into the fields. But the pursuers were unrelenting. They ransacked houses and hacked at the doors and walls with axes. Duddu Vandanam and Duddu Ramesh were caught running out of their houses, and were attacked with axes. Vandanam died immediately and Ramesh four days later in hospital. Those who ran into the fields were chased and murdered in the fields. Tella Yevasu, Tella Moshe and Tella Muthaiah were killed thus. The way the 70-year old Tella Moshe was killed is illustrative of the massacre that took place that day. He first begged with the attackers to spare him, for he was an old man. When they

started beating him, he ran into the fields. They caught up with him, hacked him with an axe, and as he fell down on his back, they dug a spear into his groin and twisted it. Muthaiah and Yevasu were also beaten with sticks, axed and speared to death in similar fashion. Duddu Yesu was another person who was axed and died five days later in hospital, taking the death toll to six. About 20 others were hospitalised with severe injuries on the head and limbs.

The women were treated equally brutally. They were dragged out of the houses, stripped and molested. Three young girls, Mariamma (11), Victoria (13) and Sulochana were raped; after raping them a stick was dug into the private parts and twisted. Sulochana, who was married and pregnant, aborted in hospital. It is not certain the girls will survive.

It is only to be expected that politicians would make capital out of this brutality, especially considering that the Chief Minister's own people are probably involved in it. But in AP the Congress (I) is the only party that can make such capital, for the other Opposition parties are too much beholden to NTR for the measly seats they have in the Assembly or Parliament. They have therefore been content with making condemnatory statements. The Congress (I) appears to be on the road to making a big issue of it. Legend has it that when a similar massacre took place in Belchi during Janata Party's rule, Indira Gandhi rode into the village on an elephant to comfort the bereaved. Vengala Rao, the Congress (I) chief over here, was either unable to procure an elephant or realised that the heavy beast would find it difficult to navigate the muddy black soil of the cotton tracts in these monsoon months, and so chose a more modern mode of transport. Neither he nor his party is doing anything to help the refugees who have camped

in the church at Chirala, but they are out to pull down the State government if they can.

A more realistic question is whether the guilty will be punished. For the estimated 3,000 assailants, a mere 11 have been arrested till now. Most of those whom the victims have identified by name have vanished from the village. “They might even have gone to London, for they are rich people”, says the equanimous Superintendent of Police of the district. Though 3,000 people could not have found themselves armed with axes and spears spontaneously and simultaneously, he refuses to consider the possibility of a criminal conspiracy. If you press him further for stringent action, he says virtuously: “What do you want me to do, gather all the thousands of Kammas at the police station and beat them up?” We do not, indeed, but we do know what would have happened if it had been the other way around and the labourers had attacked the landlords and killed half this number. One shudders to think of what would have happened then.

EPW, 03.08.1985

Anti-Reservation, Yet Once More

Sounds of the future are sending their echoes backwards. As one reads the posters and listens to the arguments one is filled with an indistinct sense of unease, a premonition of the scenes that are going to trample along the streets of this land twenty, thirty or forty years hence; a prescience that is more akin to a feeling of *deja vu* in reversed time.

On the face of it there is nothing alarming about the picture; it is perhaps even slightly amusing. There are these hundreds of youths, boys and girls, well-fed and well-dressed, marching along the streets posters in hand and slogans on their lips. They are obviously more accustomed to picnicking than to agitating, for they are agitating as if on a picnic. Their slogans too do not belong to the world of Indian mass politics. They are, needless to say, mostly in English; and they have none of the sonorous resonance we are all accustomed to; instead they have the crisp brevity of stickers and ads.

The aplomb with which the agitation is being conducted is astonishing in itself. Not one agitation since NTR came to power has been tolerated so benignly; and never have the Andhra police smiled so much at agitators. Their hands must surely be itching to have a go at the agitators, for it must be said to their credit that they have always exhibited commendable impartiality in thrashing trouble-makers of any sort. But NTR has warned them in a well-publicised statement that “however much the anti-reservationists provoke the police, the police must not get provoked”. Democratic rights are

having their innings in Andhra. The agitators deflate the tyres of buses and police jeeps; they take out endless processions in Hyderabad, where prohibitory orders have been continuously in force for the last 17 years; one day they have a programme of travelling ticket less in buses all over the State, the next day they have a *bandh*, the third day a *rasta roko*, and so on. They are trying out all the agitational forms we have heard about and some more besides. If anyone wants to know what the future Stateless society imagined by the Communists will look like and how freely the people can exercise their democratic rights in such a society, he can walk into Hyderabad and watch it in action.

But since we are not living in a Stateless society, there is something suspicious about this; and the suspicion gets strengthened when one observes that during the same period, a procession of fishermen protesting against the government's policy of contracting out fishing rights in irrigation tanks to wealthy contractors was mercilessly lathi-charged. This, of course, is not to mention what is happening in rural Telangana in the name of suppressing the Naxalite movement.

Muralidhar Rao Commission

It all started with N T Rama Rao's decision to pull out of the Secretariat's cupboards the report of the Muralidhar Rao Commission on reservations to Backward Classes (BCs). The Commission had been appointed in January 1982 and had submitted its report in August that year. Nobody appears to have bothered much about the report all these years until NTR pulled it out recently with an eye to the ensuing elections to the Panchayat Mandals; and Muralidhar Rao himself passed away in the meanwhile with some question marks attached to his integrity.

The report, apart from being rather shoddy, is a very peculiar document. From the terms of reference it appears that the intention of the Congress government in constituting the Commission was either to comply with the letter of the recommendations of the Anantharaman Commission of 1970, which had recommended that the classification and quantum of reservations to the BCs should be reviewed after 10 years; or, worse, to actually identify at least a few Backward Castes which had 'progressed' using reservations during the last decade and delete them from the list of beneficiaries. What Muralidhar Rao (who himself belonged to a Backward Caste) did was to ignore the terms of reference and set out to do all he could to help the Backward Castes, a decision that is difficult to find fault with, all things considered. He therefore refused to delete any of the Backward Castes from the existing list (with the exception of one section of the Kalingas of Srikakulam), but added nine more to the list instead. Since it would be a miracle if any Backward Caste had succeeded in pulling itself up to level with the Reddys, Brahmins and Kammas in a matter of ten years, it is difficult to find fault with this reluctance either.

What really got the goat of the Forward Castes, however, was that he recommended that the quantum of reservations for the BCs should be increased from 25 to 44 per cent. He supported this by a simple piece of arithmetic. The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities together constitute about 30 per cent of Andhra's population. The remaining 70 per cent is to be shared out between the BCs and the Forward Castes. Since no caste-based census has been taken after 1931, Muralidhar Rao chose to go by the estimate of the Mandal Commission, which had taken the Forward Castes to represent 17.58 per cent of the population. Muralidhar Rao, who apparently did not care for decimals, rounded this off to 18

per cent, and deduced that the BCs therefore constitute 52 per cent of the State's population. He further estimated that about 8 per cent of the BCs manage to compete on their own steam with the Forward Castes. How he arrives at this estimate is rather obscure, for he has obviously not gone in for any kind of statistical exercise, and indeed total unconcern for any systemic procedure in arriving at numerical estimates is the hallmark of his effort; but it is indicative of the scruples he suffered from that he thought of estimating this figure at all. He then deducted this 8 per cent from 52 and arrived at the recommendation of 44 per cent reservations for the BCs. He must have breathed his last at peace with himself.

It is this arithmetic that infuriated the Forward Castes. Their argument is that Muralidhar Rao on the one hand accepts the Mandal Commission's estimate of the proportion of Forward Castes in the population, but on the other hand will have nothing to do with that Commission's criterion for backwardness; instead he jealously keeps out of the list of BCs some of the presently Forward Caste communities which might possibly become backward by the Mandal Commission's criterion. It is this suspension in the paradise of *Trisanku*, where they have neither the benefit of being reckoned backward, nor the numerical advantage of being enumerated forward, that really enraged them. They have therefore been digging up the censuses of 1921 and 1931 and taking a head count of their ancestors to prove how numerous they were and therefore are. Understandably, a lot of cooking up of statistics is going on in the process. Numerical accuracy is too fragile a thing to stand up to the exigencies of social conflicts. The Forward Castes have come up with the estimate that they constituted 33 per cent - and not 17.58 as Mandal would have it - in the year 1921, and therefore that the BCs also constituted another

33 to 35 per cent of the population and not 52. They achieved this miracle by counting the entire heterogeneous Kapu caste complex as Forward Castes, though half of those castes are backward according to the 1970 list. The truth is that notwithstanding the evident discrepancy between the Mandal Commission's well-defined criteria for identifying Backward Castes and Muralidhar Rao's lack of any criterion at all, it turns out that the population estimates of Muralidhar Rao are reasonably accurate, entirely by accident and in spite of himself. A careful computation of the 1921 census shows that the Hindu BCs (as classified in 1970) constituted about 42 per cent of the population then. To arrive at the current proportion, one should do three things: add the population of the De-Notified Tribes as well as Backward Class Muslims and converted Christians; add the population of the nine new castes recommended for inclusion in the list of BCs by Muralidhar Rao; and take account of the likelihood that the population of the BCs has had a relative acceleration of its growth rate, since it is generally known that the poor have had a higher growth rate of population than the rich in recent decades. Taking all these into consideration, there is no doubt about the BCs being more than 50 per cent of the State's population at present.

The Agitation

Whatever the facts, it is two months since the Forward Castes took to the streets. Officially, all the political parties defend reservations, but on the sly it is the leaders of their student and youth wings that are leading the agitation. This is particularly true of the BJP, whose student followers in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) constitute the bulk of the anti-reservation, especially in the Telangana districts. The agitators have formed an organisation called the AP Nava

Sangharshanana Samiti (APNSS), as well as a Parents' Association. If all this appears to have some resemblance to the Gujarat anti-reservation agitation, that is obviously no accident.

Every reactionary social movement creates a myth that truly symbolises it, justifies it in its own eyes and in the eyes of the prevalent normative presumptions. The myth generated by the anti-reservationists of Andhra centres around a patriotic concern for 'merit'. The brunt of their ideological attack is that reservations destroy 'merit'. The ontological status of this thing called 'merit' is almost that of a physical substance that resides in different people in different quantities. It is the latent Brahminism of our culture asserting itself. This 'merit' is measured accurately by the percentage of marks a student gets in his examinations; due recognition to 'merit' is necessary if the nation is to progress; and conversely, everybody who has this 'merit' is an asset to the nation. There is no need to labour the absurdity of these notions but they seem to be serving the purpose of legitimising the agitation in the eyes of those persons who would otherwise be unwilling to openly oppose reservations, whatever they may think of them at heart.

It is interesting that the anti-reservationists have chosen this myth in preference to certain more populist myths that they could have adopted; like for instance the large body of lower middle classes among the Forward Castes, who could also do with a helping hand from the State. In the beginning, it was argued for a while that reservations to Backward Classes are depriving the poor among the Forward Castes of their educational and employment opportunities, an argument that sounded reasonable enough to attract many people. It so happened that at this time an unemployed Reddy youth committed suicide at Hyderabad. The Press put the news quite

deliberately on the front page, and the anti-reservationists made much of it, implying that he had been killed by the policy of reservations, and the harm done to the nation thereby. Emphasis on such a non-populist and elitist myth is probably due to the preponderance of the RSS outlook among the agitators, an outlook that is known to dislike socialism so much that it will not even be populist.

And corresponding to the myth they have chosen, their campaign, though physically at a low key, is quite vicious in the arguments and notions it is spreading. All of a sudden the Forward Castes have collectively become meritorious and the rest of the people incompetents. It is Manu and the *Baudhayana* resurrecting themselves with a vengeance, the oddity being that the identity of the agents of the resurrection, most of whom those worthies would have recognised as Sudras, would scandalise them. The image of the Backward Castes deliberately set up and propagated by the agitationists is that of worthless incompetents sneaking up from behind and depriving brilliant and deserving youth of college seats and jobs, and destroying the nation's prospects of achieving greatness. Some of the slogans printed on the posters they are carrying are quite offensive. In medical colleges they have put up pictures depicting a Backward Caste medical graduate removing a tooth instead of an eye; those who get seats and jobs on reservation make unreliable engineers and inefficient bureaucrats; and so on. And by way of relief, some of the slogans are amusing. One frequently printed slogan carries the plaint: 'Is it a sin to be born in a Forward Caste?' The ironical justice of the question will strike anyone with a sense of history.

In spite of this viciousness latent in their campaign, they are having a field day. The State is uncommonly benign, and the Press is terribly friendly. Everything the agitationists do is

described as ‘imaginative’, ‘innovative’, ‘interesting’, etc. Every day for the last two months every newspaper has been carrying front-page photographs of the anti-reservationists doing all kinds of mundane things: taking out processions, sticking posters, deflating the tyres of police jeeps, polishing shoes and sweeping roads (which are among the novel agitational methods invented by them), and so on. Their meetings and Press conferences are reported in a most tendentious fashion. It is rarely that so much appreciative commentary is added to routine reporting in the daily Press.

The Reactions

Two kinds of reactions are of interest, one that of the BCs and the other that of the Left. To put it simply, the BCs are ineffective and the Left is groping around. The reasons are perhaps to be sought in a proper understanding of what these anti-reservation agitations really signify. Reactionary social movements rarely mean what they say, nor signify what they pretend to. A failing of the Left has always been that it discusses issues within the terms and parameters set by the opposition, instead of dissecting the terms of the discussion themselves. So long as the discussion of the ‘reservations question’ keeps turning around unemployment among the lower middle class Forward Castes, the alleged monopolisation of the benefits of reservations by upper class BCs, or the question of ‘merit’, we may at best succeed in debunking a couple of myths, or salvaging our consciences by inviting all the poor irrespective of caste and creed to unite. But we will never understand *why* the anti-reservation movements are picking up just now, why they are being sponsored and led by the propertied people who have no real need of a government job, why the lower middle class Forward Caste youth running behind the anti-reservationists are unable to realise that getting rid of

reservations will not solve their problem of unemployment because it will not create more jobs, why (as some progressives bemoan in frustration) nobody is able to realise that socialism is the only solution to the problem, neither reservations nor 'open' competition. Take for instance the active participation of girl students in the agitation, certainly a rather unusual phenomenon. A bemused newspaper man who sits at this desk receiving Press notes is struck by the fact that most of the running around for the anti-reservationists is being done by the girl students; these girls, he says, will not be able to pursue careers anyway, whatever be their aspirations. Many of them will not even get as far as applying for jobs; and it is difficult to believe that they are worried about the jobs-to-be of their husbands-to-be; human beings are rational but not all that much. For the girls, especially these middle class Forward Caste girls, dowry and the macabre phenomenon called 'dowry deaths' are much more immediate problems that one would, by common notions of human rationality, expect to engage their attention more than reservations. And yet, he says, he has never seen them one-tenth as active in an anti-dowry campaign.

Another thing that has equally surprised observers is the inability of the BCs to unite and defend their rights. Muralidhar Rao estimated their numbers as 52 per cent of the population. Even the most rabid Upper Caste estimate puts their number higher than that of the Upper Castes. And yet, even as the APNSS of the Upper Castes is having a field day with its agitation, the counter-organisation floated by the BCs, the AP Sama Sangram Parishad (APSSP) has not only not created a notable impression, but it soon split into two and it is to be seen whether the two put together will be any more effective than the original one. Unless one is to interpret this too as lack

of 'merit' on the part of the BCs, one must discover the reason for this oddity.

The reasons appear to lie in (a) the nature of the caste system (its real nature, not the meaningless Brahmin-Kshatriya-Vaisya-Sudra classification of the *Dharmasastras*), and (b) the pressures generated by contemporary political economy. A large part of the history of India can be told in terms of the transformation of endogamous groups or communities (loosely called tribes) into castes. The caste continues to be endogamous, but the difference is that whereas the original community was an autonomous entity as a unit of production (including primitive direct appropriation of the fruits of nature), with at most relations of exchange with surrounding society, the caste has a well-defined position within a larger unit of production. Each caste has an economic role for itself, though it is not immediately that each economic activity is served exclusively by just one caste. Since tribal communities are localised in their spread, it follows that it is most natural for castes to be localised and confined to small regions. This is a phenomenon that is easily observable with the Backward Castes: of the 100 and odd Backward Castes identified in AP, a very large number are confined to just one or two districts, or at most an eco-historical region of the state.

However, two things happen at the point of and subsequent to the transformation. One is that the tribal community frequently splits into two, indicating a class division. A large number of castes, for instance, exist in pairs, one backward, and one forward, with the difference being indicated by a prefix. For instance there are two kinds of Balijas, two kinds of Kalingas and two kinds of Velamas, etc The upper sections take to trade/cultivation, and the lower sections remain food gatherers or become labourers. The next thing that

happens is that from within the upper sections of different communities spread across a large area, a class consolidation takes place, based primarily on substantial landholding or substantial trade. The rich among the various localised communities-turned-castes consolidate across the board as a fresh grouping. But the original characteristic of endogamy is carried forward and reproduced in what is essentially a class formation and so what should have become a class of substantial landholders becomes one more caste. This appears to be the genesis of all the dominant landed castes: the Reddys and Kammas of Andhra for instance. There is no other way one can account for the wide spread of these castes across the State, in contrast to the localisation of the BC cultivating castes, unless one believes that the good Lord in his wisdom created the castes according to *guna* and *karma* as He says in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Sometimes, a secondary consolidation is attempted at a lower level, with the remaining middle level cultivating castes 'trying' to come together as another extensive caste; but in Andhra at any rate this secondary consolidation has remained incomplete. The Munnurkapus, Baliyas, Telagas, Tenugus and Mutrasis are collectively referred to as Kapus but the consolidation has remained unconsummated and the term Kapu as often refers to the profession of cultivation as to a caste or a caste complex (I believe the term Jat has the same status in parts of the North.) In contrast, the consolidation has been quite successful in the case of the upper cultivating castes; with the Kammas almost entirely so, but with the much more heterogenous Reddys to a lesser extent: the Reddys of Rayalaseema do not intermarry with those of Telangana (though there is no prohibition), and the Reddys of Nellore district are generally regarded as a sociological species all by themselves.

This historical reality lies behind the ability of the Forward Castes to attack reservations much more vigorously than the BCs are able to defend them. The difference is not merely in relative economic strength. The Scheduled Castes are on the whole much poorer than the BCs, but 'untouchability' and the predominant occupation of agricultural labour have given them an identity cutting across the regions which has enabled them in times of need to come together more effectively (as the aftermath of the Karamchedu killings of last July demonstrated), than the BCs have been able to do now. The localisation of the cultivating BCs in contrast to the wide spread of the landholding upper castes, by the very nature of their historical formation, is the reason why agitations against reservations to BCs - whether in Gujarat or in Andhra - have not met with effective resistance from the beneficiaries. This, needless to say, is only a disability and not a determinate impossibility.

It is against this backdrop of uneven caste formation that we have had a certain amount of economic development in the post-Independence period. There has been some technological modernisation in agriculture and allied activities, and an attendant growth in trade, business and finance. A new rich class has grown around this development, a class based on landholding and trade. The basis of its enrichment is certainly the possession of property, but the rich among the landholding Upper Castes have made full use of not only their substantial landholdings but also the wide spread of the Upper Castes as a whole to appropriate the fruits of this development, especially to entrench themselves in the political superstructure which has grown over this process of development and which directs it. The caste connection has played a major role in apportioning the fruits of development in favour of the rich among the Upper Castes.

It is their children, along with the children of Brahmin bureaucrats and professionals, who are leading the anti-reservation agitation today. It is not an accident that the richest among them congregate in the professional colleges - Medicine and Engineering - and it is here that the anti-reservation agitation has taken its most offensive and vicious form. Just as their fathers used the extensive presence of their castes to dominate the provincial economy and political power structure, they are today using the same extensive spread of their castes to build a strong agitation against reservations to BCs. The relatively localised BCs, which never had the capacity to consolidate over a large area so that even the rich among them could never assert themselves in the economy and polity on par with the rich Forward Castes, are equally and for the same reason handicapped in countering the agitation.

The arrogant self-assertion of the new rich provincial propertied classes is a notable phenomenon of recent years, and its footprints can be discerned in various spheres of social life and struggle. Anti-reservation agitations are one such sphere. In this essential sense there is little difference between anti-reservation agitations and 'atrocities on *harijans*' as violent attacks on the rural poor are described by our Press. In rising to dominance and riches this new rich class used its extensive caste links to rope in its lower middle class caste-fellows as camp followers and voters to help it pull itself up, and now it is using the same lower middle class caste-fellows as foot soldiers in fighting the special privileges acquired by the BCs by dint of prolonged struggles. The fascist possibilities inherent in a widespread and rapidly-consolidating class of new rich are familiar to history; and when the class is provided with an army of potential foot soldiers - whether they are only 17.58 per cent of the population or more - as a consequence of the

unique history of this country, the danger becomes more serious. The Left would do well to recognise that this is where the essence of the matter lies, neither in the obviously spurious question of salvaging ‘merit’, nor in the seemingly more rational question of unemployment and consequent frustration among youth. Reality is the last thing that should be taken at face value. Its rationality is Hegelian, not positivist. It becomes the duty of the Left to convince the lower middle classes among the Forward Castes, whose frustrations are as real as those of other poor people, to save themselves from becoming foot soldiers of fascism; if the Left confines itself to clichés like ‘reservations will not solve the problem of unemployment’, ‘it is not caste but class that is decisive’, it will be fiddling trite tunes while the *moballas* burn.

EPW, 06.09.1986

Reservations: The Court Says No

In a judgment delivered on September 5, a full bench of the AP High Court held that the State Government's GO enhancing the Backward Classes (BC) quota of reservations in jobs and college seats from 25 to 44 per cent was unconstitutional; the judgment rang down the curtain on a nearly two-month long turmoil that had thrown everything out of gear in the State. The entire 'public opinion' of the State heaved a rather shameless sigh of relief, and in case that was not audible enough, all the newspapers without exception wrote editorials stating in black and white that the State government had better not go to the Supreme Court in appeal against the judgment. It was plainly their unanimous wish that the whole thing be forgotten as a bad dream. But NTR was in no need of such advice. He hastened to thank the High Court for holding the GO only unconstitutional and not *mala fide* in its intentions as had been alleged, *inter alia*, by the petitioners; deduced the happy corollary that his government would not have to resign (for mere unconstitutionality of its acts, if such it is, is no ground for resignation of a government); and promised the increasingly strident anti-reservationists that he would not appeal to the Supreme Court but would abide silently by the High Court's judgment. He invited them for talks immediately after the judgment was delivered, and it was only after he promised with an uncharacteristic humility to behave himself that the anti-reservationists called off their agitation and walked out in jubilation into the streets littered with the

broken glass panes of the buses stoned by them during the last six weeks.

A purely legal analysis of the judgment can be left to pundits. How exactly a reservation quota of 25 per cent is not discriminatory, not violative of Articles 15 and 16, but a quota of 44 per cent becomes unconstitutional is not very clear. There is no quantitative restriction in 15 (4) and 16 (4) which allow special privileges to be given to Backward Classes, and there is no justification for arbitrarily and irrationally reading such a restriction into those exceptional clauses. How a total reservation of 50 per cent for all categories of beneficiaries put together is Constitutional but anything more is not, is a piece of wisdom that was advanced hesitantly ('speaking generally') by the Supreme Court in 1963 (*M.R. Balaji v State of Mysore*, AIR 1963 SC 649), and that everybody has been quoting for the last 23 years is also not very clear. More to the point, it is not apparent on the face of it that the courts are right in arrogating to themselves the authority to decide not only upon the Constitutionality of the principle of protective discrimination but also how much protection is Constitutional and how much is not. Nor that there is any rationality to the barrier at 50 per cent for total reservations. Why 50? Why not 49 or 51 or 70 for that matter? Let us recall here that illiteracy is 65 per cent, rural poverty 70 per cent and malnutrition nobody knows what per cent in this benighted land. Muralidhar Rao, the Chairman of the one-man commission on Backward Classes, whose report led to the present fracas, adopted the method of estimating the proportion of BCs in the State's population, and deducting from this figure the proportion which he felt was in a position to compete on par with the Forward Castes, he recommended the remainder as the appropriate quota of reservations for the BCs. This procedure

- however shoddy Muralidhar Rao's calculations may have been
- is rational and logical, in contrast to the prescription that total reservations should not exceed 50 per cent, which is entirely arbitrary and has no rational basis whatsoever. In any case, it is obviously a matter for the Legislature to prescribe any such restrictions and not for the Courts.

Anti-Reservations Offensive

Leaving these considerations to experts to wrangle over, it is worth taking a bird's-eye view of the events preceding and succeeding the judgment. Forward Caste students formed the AP Nava Sangharshana Samiti (APNSS) almost immediately after the GO was issued. They began their campaign with a lot of circumspection, an unconscious tribute perhaps to the long though chequered history of the Left in this State. They made it very clear in the beginning that they were not opposed to reservations as such but only to the hike in the BCs quota from 25 to 44 per cent; that their concern was with unemployment among Forward Caste educated youth; that the whole policy of reservations was an eyewash that did not benefit the really poor among the BCs; and so on. The Press, in a rare exhibition of sensitivity, made it a point to describe their agitation by the unwieldy title 'anti-reservation hike' or 'anti-excess reservation' movement rather than 'anti-reservation' movement. Reports in the Press would invariably start with the lead: "the students who are agitating against the hike in reservations"; not for one second would they allow the reader to forget that it was the 'hike' that was being opposed and not reservations as such.

The anti-reservationists went to the High Court contending that the GO was violative of Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution, and got an interim order suspending the operation of the GO. Strengthened by this victory they stepped

up their offensive. Indeed, throughout this period, the more battles they won the more aggressive they became, much to NTR's discomfiture. They quickly stopped making any distinction between reservations as such and hike in reservations. From unemployment, the argument shifted to 'merit'. It was argued incessantly that reservations were preventing meritorious students from getting college seats and jobs, and that thereby the nation was losing precious talent. They also turned somewhat violent, stoning buses, breaking glass panes and so on. It was interesting to see, in a single day's paper, a news item on one page reporting violence by the anti-reservationists and on another page a ponderous editorial congratulating them for using non-violent methods and maintaining decorum. The Press needed to invent the myth of a 'responsible and non-violent' movement to cover up for its own blatantly partisan attitude and therefore it turned a blind eye to the sizeable violence - especially destruction of public property - indulged in by the anti-reservationists. Normally, the moment a contentious issue goes to Court, the Press advises the agitationists to give up their agitation and return to normal life, and 'let the law take its course'. Vague threats of the matter being subjudice are also uttered. But with the anti-reservation movement, the Press was for once neither reporting nor just commenting, it had joined the battle; it realised perfectly well the powerful influence that a strong agitation out on the streets can have on proceedings inside a Court hall. And so, we saw the remarkable phenomenon of the Press blandly reporting the agitation of the anti-reservationists and Court proceedings in the case on the same page, day after day. Yet, when some Backward Caste youth demonstrated outside the houses of the judges after the judgment was delivered, that was universally condemned as contempt of the Court and the judiciary.

Some incidents that happened at Hyderabad on September 3 illustrate well how much pressure was concertedly built up by the anti-reservationist students, like-minded (meaning Forward Caste) government employees and the Press, to coerce the government and perhaps intimidate the Court which had completed hearing the arguments and was to deliver the judgment in a couple of days. On that day, the anti-reservationists decided to picket the State Secretariat. It is rumoured that they chose children of the Secretariat employees and officials to participate in the programme, and that they left home that morning saying ‘mummy, we are going to picket your office today’. It must be ages since anybody was last allowed to picket or even demonstrate anywhere near the vicinity of the State Secretariat at Hyderabad. But APNSS was not only allowed to do so, the police obligingly barricaded the street on both sides of the Secretariat, stopping all traffic, and allowed the picketers a field day. They not only picketed the Secretariat, they staged impromptu plays, sang songs and danced on a normally very busy road now emptied for their convenience at the behest of an administration that they were supposedly fighting against. This went on for two full hours, in spite of the fact that the policing arrangements were under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) West Zone, KS Vyas, a notoriously trigger-happy police officer. As SP, Nalgonda, it was he who had revived ‘encounter’ killings in 1981, and later as SP of Vijayawada urban district he created such a situation that the local Congress (I) leaders, of all people, were driven to stage *dharnas* for civil liberties. But on September 3 he was obviously under a different kind of instructions. The Press, however, had an incredibly ingenuous story to account for the unprecedented success of the picketers. They had, the papers said, adopted the brilliant tactic of arranging the girl students in a circle to form a ring around the picketers, thereby

preventing the police from getting at them, as if such delicacies have ever stopped our police from having a go at agitations!

Revenge on NTR

At the end of two hours of playful picketing, the DCP asked the students to disperse, telling them that they had had their pleasure. They refused, and after some wrangling he ordered a lathi charge. The girl students were beaten. This annoyed the staff of the Secretariat who had gathered along the *verandahs* of their offices to watch the fun; the parents were naturally angry to see their children beaten. They started stoning the policemen from inside. The Police Commissioner is said to have received a bad injury on his face, an incident that would have in different circumstances led to large-scale police firing and deaths; in this instance the police entered the Secretariat and chased the employees inside; they ran in, straight to the Chief Minister, surrounded him, abused him and gheraoed him, perhaps the most militant action during the last three years of a section of the public that has been most badly ill-treated by NTR. He has always treated the government employees as almost personal enemies, and now they had their revenge, taking advantage of the strange docility the administration had taken upon itself. They boycotted their offices for four days running.

The next day's papers put the whole thing in headlines as if it was Jallianwala Bagh followed by the Mutiny. And, even as the judges must have been preparing and writing the judgments, the anti-reservationists forced widespread *bandhs* and road blocks across the State. At the Prakasam barrage across the Krishna river, a busy bottleneck on the Madras-Calcutta highway, a handful of students blocked traffic for nearly three hours on September 5, as an obliging police force looked on, thereby holding up traffic for at least 50 kms either

way. And further down the highway, Forward Caste students of the Nagarjuna University squatted on the road and held up the heavy traffic for a further stretch. At Hyderabad, the Secretariat staff continued their boycott of work and agitation against the CM. That man must have been terribly frustrated in his fascist instincts by this peculiar inability to handle trouble-makers as he is accustomed to. And all the while newspapers carried screeching headlines on every little thing the anti-reservationists did. It was in this intimidating atmosphere that the full bench consisting of one Scheduled Caste judge, one Backward Caste judge and one Forward Caste judge with an established reputation for his progressive views, held that the enhancement of reservations was unconstitutional.

Unfortunate Arithmetic

The Court struck down the GO on the principal ground that the Muralidhara Rao Commission's estimate of the population of BCs as 52 per cent of the State's population was erroneous. It also expressed itself against a reservation policy that reserves more than 50 per cent of jobs and seats. In arriving at its population figures, the Court balanced the various estimates put forward by the Forward Caste petitioners and came to the conclusion that the proportion of BCs was about 35 per cent. Law and the Constitution apart, the numerical estimate is perhaps the most unfortunate part of the judgment. The Court chose to completely ignore the detailed estimates provided by the State government, extrapolating from the 1921 and 1931 censuses, which showed that the BCs constitute at least 50 per cent of the population at present; instead it blindly accepted the calculation of the anti-reservationists who added up all the *kapu* castes (many of which are BCs) to arrive at a highly inflated figure for the Forward Caste population and by elimination therefore a

deflated estimate for the population of BCs. This chicanery they put down in cold print and distributed as a leaflet in the name of Prajabhyudaya Samiti, and repeated in their petition presented to the Court. This was pointed out in its reply by the State. If the Court even then had some doubts it could have directed the government to conduct a caste-based census or at least an extensive sample survey to arrive at the proper population estimate. Instead, it chose to say that it had balanced all the figures put forward before it and arrived at the figure of 35 per cent. If one is not overawed by the supposed wisdom of the judiciary, one cannot help recognising that any serious opinion in this regard would require (i) a detailed study on the 1921 and 1931 censuses, which the court did not undertake, (ii) knowledge of the differential growth rates of the population of the different castes, regarding which no studies exist, and (iii) some elementary training in statistical analysis, which the judges do not have. Lacking at these, their 'estimate' is no better than the jugglery indulged in by Muralidhar Rao, and is likely to be worse since it is vitiated by the lack of partisan concern for the depressed that the latter had.

It is perhaps time that the entire matter was taken out of the hands of the vagaries of judicial pronouncements. The Courts are obviously being asked to do something that they have neither the Constitutional authority nor the competence to do. Till now the rulers of the country, unsure of the likely militancy of the beneficiaries of reservations, have been dithering and allowing the issue to drift with successive court judgments. In the prevalent anti-welfare, anti-populist and anti-poor atmosphere the experience of Andhra may well encourage the government to quickly bring forward legislation, perhaps an amendment to Articles 15 (4) and 16 (4), making the 50 per cent barrier to total reservations a legal upper limit. The

supremely confident stridency of the anti-reservationists was first exhibited in Gandhian Gujarat and is now repeated in a State with a significant Left history. To complete the picture we have the exhibition of a hapless reaction on the part of the BCs, both in Gujarat and in Andhra. This must have certainly opened the eyes of the rulers to the fact that in the absence of a proper political orientation, numbers do not count for much when they are on the side of the deprived, whereas power counts for a lot even on the side of a numerical minority.

The Real Victors

The Left will dither as usual. Some of them may even congratulate the Courts and the government for recognising that it is not caste but class that matters. The Left in India has always been remarkably large-hearted in identifying and complimenting radicalism wherever it exhibits itself and for whatever purpose. The real victors, in the eventuality of reservations taking a statutory beating, will be neither the lower middle Forward Castes, nor the principle of recognition to merit and competence, nor the sanctimonious aversion to pampering the weak too much, nor the theory of Marx as against that of Ram Manohar Lohia; the real victors will be the class of the provincial rich, the landlord-trader-contractor-broker class that has over the years built itself strand by strand into the sinews and muscles of India's ruling classes. In building itself up it has made full use of caste as a weapon and a tool. The propertied classes have never hesitated to use caste as a weapon in strengthening and reproducing class power; it is only the radicals who are worried that to talk of caste damages class struggle. There is not a single provincial politician, member of legislature, chairman of a zilla parishad, director of co-operative society, president of a rural bank, not a single contractor, supplier, trader, financier or broker who has not

made essential use of his caste links to provide manpower, lung power and muscle power to facilitate his rise. Having done that, and even as they do that, they will not allow the backward and *panchama* castes to use their caste identity to get a miserable clerk's job or a college seat to get a worthless degree certificate.

This is the essence of the matter, and it will be a sad day when the Left acquiesces silently with the attempt to legislate an upper limit of 50 per cent for reservation. If that is done, it will not be long before an assault is begun on each and every one of the welfare measures won by the poor by hard struggle. The scenario fits into an increasingly visible pattern, does it not?

EPW, 20.09.1986

Defeat in Victory

The Press has hailed it as a repeat mandate for NT Rama Rao but his party's victory in the recently concluded panchayat (upper tier) elections is not all that spectacular. Compared to the 1985 Assembly polls he has actually fallen short of maintaining his hold in terms of the percentage of posts won, while the Congress (I) has pulled itself up almost double; partly at NTR's expense but mainly at the expense of the other Opposition parties. Barring the CPI (M), and that too thanks to the party's alliance with NTR, all the others have come a sad cropper. The Congress (I) did even better in the municipal elections which were held simultaneously, winning more than half the 95 municipalities, including the Corporation of Vijayawada.

Differential percentages of votes are being calculated and comparative graphs drawn up by determined analysts who are never daunted by the fact that their graphs have never been good for extrapolating to future elections - about the only genuinely useful purpose a graph can serve, if you count out its intimidatory value to the uninitiated - but there are many other things worth analysing. Like why NTR chose to restructure the panchayat system with a seemingly meaningless subdivision of the middle tier from panchayat blocks to much smaller panchayat mandals; why he has chosen to have direct rather than indirect elections to the posts of mandal presidents and zilla parishad chairmen; why, indeed, he has at all chosen to have elections right in the middle of a happy and unlikely-

to-be-disturbed five-year Assembly term; why he has been denied victory precisely in the Krishna delta that nurtured his party in 1983; and finally, why the almost simultaneous restructuring of grassroots democratic structures in Karnataka and Andhra have just about as much of a likeness as the Mad Hatter's raven and the writing desk.

NTR's wisdom has always been a dubious thing but he certainly has had intelligent advisers. And somebody must have made it clear to him quite early in his rule that political power just does not consist of getting into the top seat, which is about all he achieved with the massive victory he got in 1983. The seemingly tidal wave-like victory left behind it the foundations and pillars of the power structure - in the gram panchayats, the panchayat blocks, the zilla parishads, the town municipalities and the three corporations at Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada - intact either in the hands of the Congress or in the hands of an *ad hoc* administration formed during Congress rule. Then there was the *patel-patwari* duo in the villages - called by different names in different parts of the country but the base pillar of the State structure in rural India at least since the time of Feroz Tughlaq - committed heart and soul to 'Congress culture', especially in Telangana and Rayalaseema. And finally, there was the bureaucracy with its manifold links with the Congress party and its leaders at all levels from the State Secretariat to the headquarters of the remotest tehsil. True, a part of this structure - especially in the Krishna and Godavari deltas - had defected to NTR's side in 1983 and had contributed to his victory but that was only a small part. And if NTR had any illusions that with the cash box in his tight fist, these antipathic structures could cause him no harm he was soon disabused of the illusion when the non-gazetted officers (NGOs) of his government went on a

strike immediately after he came to power in 1983. He crushed the strike with the ruthlessness of a novice and has had his hands full with the fight against these diverse left-overs of Congress rule ever since. The *patels* and *patwaris* he abolished with a stroke of the pen, and was hailed for this significant anti-feudal measure by the two Communist parties which were his allies then; as for the other dragon - the bureaucracy - NTR has had many inconclusive rounds of fencing with it. He is known to ill-treat senior IAS officers who have neither the gumption nor the unity to get together and tell him where he gets off; and his relation of mutual hatred with the NGOs is a fact of administrative life in this State. When they went on a 58-day strike recently, he got their leaders arrested under the National Security Act for using abusive language against him (he said as much to Press reporters who asked why a Preventive Detention Act had to be used against middle class salaried employees) and got some of them terminated without an enquiry under Article 311 (2) (b) of the Indian Constitution. But perhaps he now has cause to rue his rashness, for his enmity with the NGOs must certainly have contributed to his loss in the recent municipal elections.

Soon after coming to power in 1983, NTR took on a long struggle to displace the Congress (I) from the zilla parishads and the municipalities. The mixed success he had in this endeavour convinced him of the need to go in for elections across the board; and he also seems to have realised that defeating the Congress is not just a matter of having elections to all the grassroots democratic institutions; it is necessary to shake the structure at some point if the thousands of threads that are built into it are to snap and make way for his mandate. Having direct elections to the top posts would cut through some of the threads but more of a restructuring was felt to be

necessary. The gram panchayats he could not tamper with and as for the zillas or districts, they are too much an inalienable part of our cultural topography to be disturbed and reorganised. He hit at the middle tier: the panchayat blocks were divided into smaller panchayat mandals, called mandal praja parishads, each consisting of about 12 to 15 villages, and the revenue taluks were also replaced by the revenue mandals to coincide with the panchayat mandals. The zilla parishads, for the sake of rhyme, were renamed zilla praja parishads. The ostensible reason for the structural change was to make the panchayat and revenue headquarters accessible to the people, as if the inaccessibility lay in distance and not in corruption, callousness and incomprehensible rules and procedures. Anyway, the recent victory in the elections to the posts of presidents of 1,058 mandals and 21 zilla praja parishads has put the seal of success on his schemes and that is what really counts.

However, all this liveliness in the grassroots democratic structures needs a second look. A major problem facing the Indian ruling class is the need to expand its base by accommodating aspiring sections of the propertied classes from below. The path of development pursued for the last four decades is usually described as a failure but it really depends upon what one means by success and failure. It certainly has enriched a lot of people and raised hopes in many others. These others may be only 'middle class' in the meaningless empiricist classification commonly employed; but in politics what matters is the position in the social structure and the power that results from it - not income directly. And while a landlord of a backward area may be economically no better off than an upper division clerk in government (a cause of much self-lament), he has more power and aspiration for power than the clerk can ever have or aspire to.

The objective need to expand at the base and accommodate these aspirants has generated a lot of debate in recent times about decentralisation of power, grassroots democracy, and so on. Proponents of these ideas may be entirely innocent of class partialities - not all of them are, by the way - and may honestly believe that they are advocating decentralised democracy, Gandhism or *bharatiya sanskriti* as against monolithic-bureaucratic-centralised-occidental structures. How they delude themselves is their affair, but what they are actually achieving is to provide room in the power structure for recently enriched sections of the propertied classes, especially in the villages.

However, there is no unique method of accommodation. One, and a rather extreme one, is to actually hand over a lot of administrative responsibility and finances to them, as Hegde appears to have done in Karnataka. The common run of democratic intellectuals are full of admiration for Hegde for this reform. The class-blindness that affects admirers of 'decentralisation' is remarkable, especially since many of them are perceptive critics when it comes to analysing other aspects of the system. Decentralisation of this type just means more power in the hands of the rural and small town rich, and in the hands of more of them; whereas earlier they had to work their interests into the structure of State or national politics now they can have more of their interests served and more directly. This is not an evil and may even check some forms of 'authoritarianism' to use a convenient term, but one thing it does imply is a greater likelihood of repression of the rural poor. Those who admire decentralisation of power should realise that there is no getting away from this reality in the given structural context. Ask any agricultural labourer or poor peasant and he will tell better than any Gandhian what it means

if his landlord actually and directly controls the administrative and financial structures of 'rural development'. The co-operative movement has already given enough indication of what it does mean.

NTR chose the other method, which does not even have the merit of honesty: create a large number of foci of power - like the 1,000 and odd panchayat mandals - so that more people may aspire for positions of power; ensuring that they are elected directly by the electorate so that they are spared the insecurity of no-confidence motions and such-like headaches; but keep decision-making authority and finances strictly away from them. What this power minus finances and decision-making means is best described as broker's power. As it is, especially since NTR came to power, this is all the power that everybody from gram panchayat sarpanches to MLAs have had, and this is the only power that NTR wishes to delegate. All decisions are taken by the State government or by bureaucratic bodies and the finances are exclusively handled by the Chief Minister; the elected representatives of the people then are merely go-betweens who run from their constituents to the government and no doubt make some money in the process. In fact, even this is rather tortuous: the people's representatives often do not even approach the decision-makers directly. All significant requests are to be routed through the Telugu Desam Party, especially the Chief Minister's youngest son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu, an able and hard-working political operator who was once upon a time a Congressman and is now the general secretary of his father-in-law's party.

That this complex of structural and political factors lay behind the elections must have been apparent to the seasoned Congress leaders. When the *patel* and *patwari* posts were abolished, the Congressmen did not dare protest though they

must have smarted at the sudden loss of their support base in the villages. The changes in the panchayat and revenue structure, they realised, would upset the web of links they had carefully built over the decades and nurtured, and therefore they reacted angrily, though once again the apparent 'democratisation' resulting from the changes stumped them. Their only real option was to participate actively in the elections and see how much they could salvage from the wreck. This they did, heart and soul. One indication of their seriousness is the number of prominent leaders who contested the chairman's posts for the zilla parishads: a notorious liquor contractor in West Godavari, an authentic warlord in Nalgonda and in 'Communist' Khammam, remembered from the days of the Telangana uprising, the very son of Vengal Rao, Union Industries Minister, PCC (I) president, and a vicious anti-Communist. The Congress (I)'s candidates for the chairman's posts in West Godavari, Krishna, Nalgonda, Khammam and Kurnool districts would be normally regarded as good enough for Cabinet posts.

It must be acknowledged that all things - especially its own debasement - considered, the Congress (I) performed well. While the Telugu Desam won 632 of the 1,058 mandal presidents' posts and 18 of the 21 zilla parishad chairmen's posts, the Congress (I) won 338 mandal presidents' posts and the remaining 3 zilla parishad chairmen's posts, including those of Krishna and Guntur districts, which are the most politically conscious in the bourgeois sense, that is to say the most electorally conscious (in the sense that you can talk electoral politics to any one picked up in the streets here and get a firm opinion about who is with whom, why, since when and how long). A better measure of the Congress' success is that 338 out of 1,058 is 31 per cent whereas their seats in the Assembly

are only about 16 per cent. More satisfying for them must be their victory in a majority of the municipal councils including the Corporation of Vijayawada.

In keeping with the structural and political importance of the elections they were accompanied by a large amount of verbal violence and quite a lot of physical violence. And in keeping with the irrelevance of the electoral process to the purported purpose of governance there were no issues of public importance involved either in the electioneering or in the voting. Severe and recurrent drought is perhaps the major problem facing the State right now, followed by police lawlessness as a close second. But neither the campaigners nor those who voted for them appear to have felt that electioneering in a representative democracy must have something to do or at least say about these things. The reason why election forecasts based on solid reasoning normally go wrong is that those who do the forecasts never vote, and in lieu of participation in what they are making a study of, they base their analysis on the received ideology which says that people elect representatives fit to solve their problems. It is by now well recognised that the representatives themselves do not believe in this; it is time to realise that the people - barring perhaps school teachers for whom it is an occupational conviction - too perceive no real connection between elections and responsible governance; or at least no more than there is between the habitual celebration of the harvest festival of *Sankranti* and the actual business of harvesting in a State that is under the 'Green Revolution' in about 10 per cent of its area and under drought in the rest. Or even between the recently imported celebration of the North Indian festival of *Holi* and the invocation of spring, which is less a season than a figure of speech in South India.

But violence there was, and a fair amount. At least seven persons died in clashes and there was large-scale booth

capturing, ballot snatching and use of explosives and firearms, especially in Krishna, Guntur, Kurnool, Cuddapah, Khammam and the Godavari districts. Many of the candidates, especially in the Rayalaseema districts where the illicit manufacture of explosives is a household industry, were recorded rowdy-sheeters. The Telugu Desam government got some Congress leaders of Kurnool arrested during the electioneering under the Anti-Goonda Act, NTR's own Preventive Detention Act meant for prevention of bootlegging, prostitution and such-like unseemly activities. The High Court - which probably would not have minded if they had used the more decent National Security Act - found this a little too shocking and quashed the detentions. In retaliation, Vengal Rao threatened to have Telugu Desam leaders' houses raided by tax officials.

Parallel to this physical violence was the unprecedented trading of choice abuses, not by ordinary cadre, but by NTR and his ministers on the one side and Vengal Rao on the other. The Telugu Desam's general secretary even appealed through the Press to Rajiv Gandhi to please stop Vengal Rao from using bad language. The rapid proliferation of Telugu dailies which have nothing better to report than this slanging match has egged them on; you abuse your opponents roundly today in an election meeting attended perhaps by 100 people and next morning joyfully watch all your abuse dutifully printed by at least four newspapers which together reach nearly 10 lakh gross subscribers, which probably means at least 30 lakh gross readers and perhaps 20 lakh net readers. The absolute vulgarisation of politics, which makes no pretence of issuing manifestoes and debating programmes, is ably matched by an equally vulgarised Press.

Formally, NTR has won; a closer look shows that what he has lost is significant, if not in terms of numbers then in

terms of location. The loss in the municipal elections indicates an accentuation by misgovernance of the normal phenomenon that urban voters, who receive more information, generally tend to vote against the party in power. A more significant loss is in Krishna and Guntur districts. It was the highly class-conscious gentry of the Krishna delta that planned and created NTR; it was also they who were disillusioned first when he turned out to be much less efficient than they expected in serving their interests. They now dream wistfully of the Hegde or the Jyoti Basu that might have been. But meanwhile, their creation has caught the fancy of the rest of the State and they watch helplessly as their Telugu Desam Party runs through the electorate of distant Adilabad where neither the Marwari traders in the towns nor the Gondi and Marathi speaking tribals in the forests understand one sentence of the language and sentiments of NTR's speeches.

EPW, 04.04.1987

Censorship by Force: A 'Telugu' Prescription for 'Yellow' Virus

About a year and a half ago, what is called Indian Public Opinion was taken aback when it came to know that N.T. Rama Rao - who then led and even now leads the Parliamentary opposition to the Congress (I)'s authoritarianism at the head of a thin and progressively decimated phalanx of unsuccessful and suitably humble leaders - had devised a Press Bill for Andhra Pradesh which copies verbatim the notorious Bihar Press Bill, the most authoritarian thing the Congress ever tried to impose upon the people of India. There were condemnatory articles in the Press, shocked letters to the editors, snide remarks from unsuccessful rivals of the opposition, sententious editorials in the dailies - and nobody took seriously NTR's straight-faced protestation that he intended to use the legislation only against the 'yellow' Press. Their arguments, of course, were weighty and serious but to NTR the whole thing must have seemed terribly unjust. Why can't a man use a little bit of the power he has taken so much trouble to acquire, especially for such a noble cause as fighting scurrilous journalism, without every Tom, Dick and Harry who cannot get elected even to a Municipal Council preaching democracy at him, must have been more than he could fathom. NTR's logic has always been that your democratic credentials are measured by the number of votes you can poll, and therefore there is nobody more democratic anywhere and at any time in a Parliamentary democracy than whoever is at that time in power; in the instant case, himself. He, it is true, did not devise this dialectic for it

was used before him by others, like Indira Gandhi for instance, but with him it sums up comprehensively the meaning of democracy, and forms the solid foundation of his arrogance. Whether this perspective on democracy qualifies him for being counted among - leave alone at the head of - the Left and Democratic forces is a separate question altogether.

Public opinion, however unjust, is public opinion nonetheless and NTR therefore shelved the Press Bill. No doubt not entirely by accident the shelving coincided almost exactly with the brutal murder in Vijayawada of 29-year old Pingali Dasaratharam, editor of the most successful 'yellow' venture. He was stabbed repeatedly with a knife on the evening of October 21, 1985. Murder, of course, is a well-known short-circuit for repressive legislation, though some times, like with any short-circuit, you are liable to do some damage to yourself too. In this case, however, neither NTR nor his Home Minister - whose involvement in the killing was alleged by the dead man's mother - got hurt. The police instead hit a second bird with the same stone by arresting two ex-associates of Dasaratharam - by that time editor and assistant editor of a rival publication - for his murder; they attributed the crime to rivalry, and have only this week charge-sheeted them.

It was generally expected by those who regard themselves as knowledgeable in these matters that this murder of one editor and the murder charge on a couple of others would put an end to the 'yellow' rags. The supposition was based on the assumption that scruples, convictions and courage go together and as the publishers of these magazines lack the first two they cannot possess the last. The supposition erred, perhaps, in not realising that profitability can well substitute for convictions in generating the courage required to withstand such violence; and the 'yellow' Press continues to flourish.

Not a Fringe Phenomenon

For these publications circulate widely and are very profitable. Indeed, they circulate so widely that it is doubtful that they can legitimately be called ‘yellow’ for that description carries overtones of clandestine circulation and a shame-faced clientele, neither of which applies to the ‘yellow’ Press of Andhra. Their contents, needless to add, are offensive in every sense of the term: in bad taste, obscene, untruthful at least by half, and full of vulgar innuendo and suggestive phrases. Any attempt to seriously analyse their contents is bound to severely tax even moderately squeamish sensibilities. The general scheme of any item in these publications is that you pick up a juicy bit of information - whether you can prove it or not - from the lives and activities of public personalities: politicians, film stars, businessmen and high profile administrators; add a lot of unspecific and preferably lascivious rumours to it, and write down the combination in deliberately overstated, obscene and offensive language. For instance, a news item about a Congress leader trying to get a Telugu Desam ticket would run somewhat like this; “That well known eunuch who pimped faithfully for the Nehru family all these years now wants to get into the brothel house at Hyderabad by licking NTR’s behind”.

During the last five to six years about two dozen such periodicals have come up in the State; they give themselves fantastic names like *Encounter*, *Commando*, *Caligula*, *Blood Hound*, *Nuisance*, etc (for some reason they are mostly christened in English). Dasaratharam was editor of *Encounter* and his murder-accused are editor and assistant editor of *Political Encounter*. Printed on cheap newsprint and with perhaps no expenditure other than meagre salaries to the staff, they are a profitable venture, and are worth all the tribulations their publishers may have to undergo once in a while, including an odd murder or murder rap.

But where do they get their readership from? Indeed, the question is coterminous with the equally mysterious popularity of Telugu films, for in recent times they are equally offensive - not just obscene but offensive across the board. And, taken together they constitute such a major phenomenon - a mix of unethical profit-hunting, vicarious and collective exhibitionism, self-expression of popular anger, diversionary ideological offensive by the State and ruling classes, institutionalised provision of a 'safe' catharsis to social frustration, effective acculturation in anti-democratic values by titillating packaging - that it would be a most exciting topic for sociological investigation, if we had had any genuine teaching or research in sociology being done in our universities. As it is, one can only grope for an answer. And to arrive at the answer the first step is to get rid of middle class/upper caste values, whose instinctive reaction is to reach for the Indian Penal Code, that is to say, dub the whole lot obscene under 292 IPC and arrest the publishers. However, given the wide and unabashed readership they command and the common sense fact that it makes no sense to call lakhs of people obscene, it is necessary to search for the roots of this mass obscenity.

Roots of Mass Obscenity

The roots appear to lie in the facts that; (i) though the overall literacy rate is increasing painfully slowly, the more than 2 per cent growth rate of population implies a substantial increase in the volume of literates, many of whom, for want of anything better to do, are acquiring more learning than they would have in better circumstances; like all newly literate people - partly because they are mostly young - they have a fascination for printed information and are a good market for anyone who cares to cater to them; (ii) these newly literate and educated sections live and work (or do not work) in such conditions

that on the one hand they are not given to puritanical squeamishness and on the other they bear the brunt of ruling class oppression and are therefore - once again especially because they are mostly young - much more uninhibited in their expression of anger than even the theoretically most 'extreme' intellectual with his jaded radicalism, secure living quarters and sanitised university job; (iii) they belong to a culture that, unlike the intellectual's positivist rationalism, does not regard a piece of information as unauthentic merely because it has not been reduced to bare numbers; the statement 'that well known eunuch who pimped faithfully for the Nehru family, etc, etc', makes as much sense to them as the alternative; 'Mr X, who was with the Congress party between 1964 and 1986 and resigned in the latter year, is now trying for a Telugu Desam ticket in the forthcoming Assembly elections'; (iv) and finally - and this time on the objective side of the argument - the public and private lives of our 'public' figures have reached such depths of corruption and depravity that sanitised reporting cannot really do justice to them; even at such an august level as the Fairfax and Bofors affairs, can one honestly say that the matters are most aptly captured by the polite and polished prose our English Press puts on? To put it bluntly, the 'yellow' Press merely reflects a very 'yellow' public life.

Perhaps the first person to consciously recognise the emergence of this potential market of neo-literates was Ramoji Rao, industrialist (if fruit drinks and bottled pickles can be called industries), advertiser, financier, hotelier, publisher and currently filmmaker. He started the daily *Eenadu* in the seventies, and it has gone on to become the largest circulated Telugu daily. Since it is a newspaper and caters to the traditional middle class as well as the newly literate sections, it could not take full advantage of all the possibilities opened up by the emergence

of the new market. But the paper is uncompromising in not distinguishing between facts, rumours, wishes, suggestions and innuendo. It has used this suppleness very effectively in building up NTR, bringing him to power in 1983 and keeping him there. Subsequently, all the Telugu dailies have taken to this style of reporting, with the paradoxical effect of perhaps stabilising the circulation of the English dailies, which stick to more traditional ways of reporting and are therefore found more congenial by the traditional middle class.

But, as I said, the compulsions of a daily newspaper make it impossible for even the altered Telugu Press to fill in the newly created void. Film journals did it for a while, but it was the arrival of the 'yellow' Press that really satisfied the hunger. And here it is the late Dasaratharam who must be credited with the genius of a pioneer. With Dasaratharam it became a common sight to find lower middle class first-generation-literate youth going around with a garish copy of a 'yellow' periodical in one hand. Like most people who begin bad things, he himself appears to have been a good and honest man. He was of a poor Brahmin background and had given up his studies in high school. It was with honest anger and naturally abusive style of expression that he began his periodical *Encounter*. If one makes due allowance for the lack of the value of sanitisation of information and the lack of squeamishness born of poverty, then there was much that was authentic and hurting to the rulers in what he wrote. And that his readers believed in his integrity is evidenced by the wide sympathy his murder evoked. His imitators who came later, however, are mostly more professional 'yellow' scribes and some are probably even blackmailers. It was Dasaratharam's *Encounter* that ostensibly occasioned NTR's Press Bill and the failure to get it passed was avenged with his murder.

As an aside, it is a genuine challenge to the democratic forces how to face this phenomenon of 'yellow' journalism. To dismiss it as 'yellow' is to miss the point that it is not a fringe phenomenon: as I have said, the periodicals are not bought, sold and read clandestinely. The whole affair is very much open and the readers appear to feel no consciousness of indulging in anything unseemly. How to wean away the readership from this virus is a genuine problem. The problem came up with films and film songs but wherever the Communists have been active - especially the CPI (ML) groups in recent times - their cultural troupes have at least locally made an impact that meets the challenge of the films head-on. But, it is in the sphere of the written word that the progressive cultural movement remains a fringe - and too musty and boring usually to be called *avant garde* - phenomenon. To cover up for this failure by calling the yellow Press 'lumpen' is to play into the hands of the ruling class which can equally use that description for genuine mass journalism.

Police Action

Which brings us to the denouement of the story - or at least of the first act. If the Press Bill could not be enacted, and the murder of one 'yellow' editor plus a murder charge on another two could not put a stop to the encumbrance, the rulers had to - and did think of a third way. That was to stop the sale of the publications. At the two major coastal Andhra towns of Guntur and Vijayawada the police swooped down upon the sellers of the publications and arrested them under section 292 of IPC. At Vijayawada, the arrests were made on March 22, 24 and 25, 1987 and at Guntur, on April 3. The advantage the police had was that though the sellers are large in number, they are mostly small men - *paan, bidi*, cigarette and soda shopkeepers. They could be conveniently detained in

lockup and threatened. There are, however, two things to note about the timing of the arrests: one, they took place just after the completion of the Mandal elections, as if the police were waiting for the elections to be over before taking action; two, the arrests were preceded by the publication in the February 3 number of one of the magazines, *Political Encounter*, of a story in which the Superintendent of Police, Vijayawada (urban police district), was accused of collecting huge bribes from liquor shops and bars as a consideration for not raiding them, and was further described quite pointlessly as a eunuch.

But of course arrests and cases would not be enough; Section 292 is a bailable offence and the shopkeepers had to be given bail and let off immediately. The trial will take a year or two, and moreover the prosecution perhaps will not be stupid enough to insist that the writings be recognised as obscene and the *paanwallahs* punished for selling them; for Section 292 covers not only the sale of obscene publications but also the exhibition of obscene posters, including film posters, and film producers, distributors and exhibitors being among the most important personages in Andhra's provincial ruling class, no prosecutor would miss the imprudence of asking the courts to set a precedent that could inconvenience them.

In any case, all this will take too long and is too cumbersome for the police of this State who believe in - and are honoured for - instant results. So the police - under the leadership of the Superintendent of Police, Vijayawada, who was personally affected - supplied the *paanwallahs* with a list of 20 'yellow' publications and told them plainly and bluntly that - law or no law, freedom or no freedom - they would not sell these publications henceforth. The Guntur Town *Paan Beedi* Cigarette and Soda Sellers Welfare Association (for such a thing exists) asked the police in real anger whether the prohibition

was legal; they probably have not heard of Article 19 (1) (g) of the Indian Constitution, but some deep traders' instinct must have told them that business is a universal right, Constitution or no Constitution. They also appealed to the AP Paanwallahs Association - their apex body - to please intervene and safeguard their right to sell the publications. The executive committee of that Association, however, met in an emergency session in Vijayawada on April 5, 1987, and after quoting the Guntur Town Association's appeal at length and apparently in appreciation, went on to resolve contrary wise that the *paanwallahs* of the State would henceforth desist from selling the publications listed by the police.

However, a resolution is only a resolution, and a *paanwallah* presumably does not lose much by being expelled from the association for violating it, and the periodicals continue to sell fitfully. If this unforeseen hurdle has stumped the police, they are yet to show it.

EPW, 27.06.1987

An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied Class - I

Review of 'The Peasant Movement Today' edited by Sunil Sabasrabudhey; Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1986; pp xix + 224, Rs 150.

This collection of articles in English and Hindi is polemical in a rather uncomplimentary sense. Even those who agree with the arguments put forward in the articles will find it difficult to commend them for their competence either in argument or exposition. Perhaps the only exception is Kishan Patnaik's forthright and pungent article *'Baudhik Adhoorapan aur Kisan Andolan'*. Some of the other articles give us accounts of the 'peasant' movements of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana; some of them disclose in startlingly plain language the politics of these 'peasant' movements; and some of them expound their purported philosophy, ideology and theoretical presumptions with a simple-mindedness that would be charming in the right place.

If farmers who grow commercial crops or a surplus of food grains want remunerative prices - or more - for their output there is no reason for anyone to find it surprising or immoral. Being at the receiving end of what may be loosely but fairly described as 'monopoly in the purchase of their inputs', and at the giving end of what may be equally loosely but equally fairly described as 'perfect competition in the sale of their output', even a textbook economist cannot object if they find no choice except to agitate at both ends. The 'peasant

movements' that constitute the context of this book are therefore nothing much in themselves to comment about. What makes them remarkable is the political and philosophical themes woven around them with varying degrees of realism, which means also varying degrees of wish fulfilment.

Perhaps the most real and significant political theme is the notion of absolute and unbreachable oneness of the village. This is no 'peasant unity' against landlords, itself a much controverted concept; this goes further. The entire village is one; it is Bharat for Sharad Joshi and *bahishkerit samaj* for Sunil Sahasrabudhey (*Kisan Andolan ka Aitihāsik Sandarbha*), the editor of the volume. It is the internal colony of this country, exploited by the towns, variously described as India (with the accent on the whole word, if you get the meaning) or *pashchimikerit* (westernised) *samaj*. "The leaders and sympathisers of the movement see the basic cause: in the state of affairs which allow or perpetrate the exploitation of the peasantry by the urban industrial elite, of the competitive farm sector by the monopolistic industrial sector, of the raw materials in favour of the finished products, of the labour intensive sphere of production in favour of the capital intensive sphere of production and of the indigenous people by the westernised few" ('Brief Summary', Sunil Sahasrabudhey). "The farmers' movement today is presenting a new point of view. The reason for our poverty is the domination of urban industrial India over the rural Bharat" ('Modern Science: A 'Universal' Myth', Ashok Jhunjhunwala).

Girish Sahasrabudhey makes things a little more explicit: "in all the farmers' agitations that are today taking place in various States of the country it is explicitly recognised that the poverty of rural areas is based not on exploitation within but without the agricultural economy" ('The New Farmers'

Movement in Maharashtra', Girish Sahasrabudhey). The mechanism of exploitation is the payment of unremunerative prices for the output of Bharat. "The movement has attempted to show that underpinning the agricultural produce is the chief mechanism of exploitation of the peasantry" ('Brief Summary', Sunil Sahasrabudhey). Sharad Joshi is much more forthright. "The post-independence economic development policies are essentially aimed at mobilisation of the agricultural surplus for the formation of capital necessary for the industrial development" ('Scrap APC-Demand Farmers', Sharad Joshi).

Protesting too much

There are four implications that would follow immediately from the logic employed unanimously by all the contributors: (i) that there are no exploited or poor people in towns, (ii) that there are no exploiters in villages, (iii) that all the 'villagers' have essentially the same interest and that interest takes its economic expression in remunerative prices for that part of the produce that is sold in the market, and (iv) that the rural-urban divide is absolute and no 'villager' has urban interests. The contributors would have no difficulty with the first of these four, for though there is little explicit mention of the urban poor, it would in no way breach their logic to admit them into Bharat; but of course the 'poor' are defined not as all those who sell or mortgage their labour power, for that would include the organised working class for which the ideologues of these 'peasant' movements have a particular disliking. Nor are they so vulgar as to define the poor in terms of income. They would perhaps include the workers of labour intensive-technologically-traditional-unorganised urban industry in their Bharat or *babishkerit samaj*. So far so good. The real difficulty comes with the rest of the implications. They are all so noisily vehement on the second and third points that

one is forced to suspect that they are protesting too much. So much noise can only be a cover-up for a myth that is carefully sought to be built up and projected. And the pugnacity with which this projection is being attempted is such that they will not even allow themselves the convenience of identifying a comprador class or a fifth column for India inside Bharat.

If capital intensive-industrial-westernised 'India' is plundering Bharat, then even a cursory glance at Bharat would reveal quite a number of quislings whose life and production styles are in no essential sense different from those of 'Indians'. In view of the ease with which radical critics could demolish this myth it would be the most natural thing for these ideologues to at least formally distance themselves from these, shall we say, compradors. If they have nevertheless resisted the temptation and persist in bluntly and repeatedly declaring that there are no class differences inside the village and, on the contrary, identify it as the cardinal point of difference between their 'peasant' agitations and the peasant struggles that have been in the past that while the latter were struggles *within* the village, between rural class and rural class, these are struggles between the village as a unit and the urban world, then that heroism tells a tale all of its own.

Could it be that the most vociferous of these *bahishkerits* are precisely those who have one foot in India and one in Bharat? And - apart from these fifth columnists - the substantial core of these 'peasant' movements are those who would brook no talk of class differences, let alone antagonism, between those who produce a surplus of food grains and those who produce none or a deficit; much less between landholders and landless labourers. This forces the ideologues into a crude theory of village unity, against their own better judgment, one suspects. Of all the contributors, Surendra Suman (*'Kisan Samasya Sabhyata Ka Sankat'*) alone is honest enough to find the whole

thing rather dubious; it is perhaps no accident that his region of study is Bihar, a State where it is the least possible to pretend that the whole village is one. He confesses that among the 'peasants' there are some who even possess aircraft of their own, a circumstance that should have led him and the other participants of the seminar to ponder a little whether the word 'peasant' means anything at all, and if so, precisely what. Instead, he invents the apology that "therefore it is not easy to grasp the reality of peasant problems on the basis of mere economic considerations", and goes on to postulate that it is a question of one civilisation against another, the dominant (urban) civilisation versus the dominated and rejected (rural) civilisation. This obviously takes us quite far from remunerative prices for marketed food grains, which is a mere 'economic' consideration, but then the more a situation requires an ideology to mystify it, the farther that ideology will be from the reality it mystifies. This is indeed the law by which cognition of reality loses its veracity to various degrees and becomes a piece of mystification.

Piece of Mystification

The truth is that let alone village unity, even the rural-urban divide makes only qualified sense in today's India. It makes sense for the rural poor for whom the urban world is often inaccessible, alien, and a source of plunder and oppression. It is a different matter with the rural rich, who are as class co-extensive with the urban trader-professional-financier-contractor class. It makes much more sense for purposes of political analysis to talk of this entire class as one - the provincial propertied class - notwithstanding all the differences and contradictions they contain among themselves, than to isolate one segment and call it the 'rich peasantry', much less to club this 'rich peasantry' with the rest of the village and talk of the village as opposed to the towns and

cities. Kripa Shankar ("Should Agricultural Prices Be Raised?") need not feel surprised to discover that the rich farmers who agitate for remunerative prices have "by and large not directed the movement against the machinations and loot of the traders". Even a casual acquaintance with changing reality would reveal that a substantial part of (especially) the gram trade has passed from the traditional trading communities to castes which are associated with landholding. Today's India is not the India of the Deccan riots of the mid-nineteenth century. The upper sections of the landholders are no longer unequivocally opposed in their interests to the urban traders.

A typical family of this provincial propertied class has a landholding in its native village, cultivated by hired labour, *bataidars*, tenants or farm-servants and supervised by the father or one son; business of various descriptions in towns - trade, finance, hotels, cinemas and contracts - managed by other sons; and perhaps a young and bright child who is a doctor or engineer or maybe even a professor at one of the small town universities that have sprouted all over the country during the last two decades. It is this class that is most vocal about injustice done to 'villages'. You can hear their irate declamations in the staff rooms of our provincial universities, though they mostly do not have what it takes to tackle the traditional Marxists or the liberal intellectuals who live in Delhi or Calcutta. But soon, now that Rajiv Gandhi's Navodaya schools are coming up all over the country - precisely to convert the children of this class into at least good imitations of the metropolitan public school products - we may have a more sophisticated critique of India's domination of Bharat; if the critics are by then as *pashchimi* as the favoured children of India, then that will only expose the shallowness of this debate.

It is only an apparent paradox that it is precisely the rise of this class straddling rural and urban India that is the cause

of all this India-Bharat fuss. The Indian State had itself created this class in an attempt to strengthen its support base. If we are to talk of appropriation of agricultural surplus to feed industry, then (to the extent that it is not a very partial depiction of reality) it is a phenomenon as ancient as industrialisation; if the reaction has nevertheless come up only in the post-1970 period, that is precisely because it is in this period that the attempt of industry to link itself with agriculture not just by taking over its products to feed its workers but also by providing inputs to increase that product, came to some kind of fruition. In other words, it is the (howsoever limited) success in incorporating a segment of Bharat into India that has led to the generation of this ideology of Bharat vs India as an absolute divide.

Source of Oppression

This is no argument against the ideology as such, but it does tell us a lot about its politics. In some parts of the country these 'peasant' movements are taking up rural problems of quite a wide range and therefore appear quite democratic to observers. But if one is to go to the root of the matter, one must recognise in them - at least in one significant aspect if not their essential core - a potential source of suppression of the rural poor. This can be seen in regions where the rural poor are organising themselves militantly, in the viciousness with which ideas such as 'village unity' are put forward by gun-toting landlords; and the rage with which the concept of class struggle is opposed. One can also perhaps hear echoes of it in the last sentence of Kishan Patnaik's article (*'Baudhik Adhoroapan aur Kisan Andolan'*). Can we not make bold to conclude that the activities of those who are thoughtlessly calling forth class struggle in the villages and dismembering village society actually help the interests of monopoly capital?

Or one can see it refracted in the peculiar historiography of Sunil Sahasrabudhey (*Kisan Andolan ka Aitihāsik Sandarbha*) who sees the ancestry of these struggles of the alleged *babishkritis*, not in the anti-zamindar, anti-landlord and anti-moneylender struggles of the peasantry in colonial India but exclusively in the Congress' nationalist movement of 1920-1947 ("The politics of *babishkrit samaj* entered history with Gandhi"). It has perhaps not struck him as ironical that the class struggles of the peasantry of the past that he would rather not take recognition of are in many cases the quite literal genealogical ancestors of these 'peasant' struggles whose ideologue he has set out to be. Sharad Joshi's followers in Maharashtra will certainly count among their great grandparents participants of the anti-Mahajan Deccan riots of the 19th century. That their preferred historiography chooses to disown this ancestry tells a tale all of its own.

Perhaps the village of Karamchedu in Andhra Pradesh testifies to this duality rather neatly. The village became known two years ago for one of the worst killings of *Harijans* in recent times. In 1980, farmers of this rich tobacco growing village agitated for higher prices for tobacco and two youth of their families got killed in a police firing. It was youth of precisely the same tobacco farmers' families who assaulted the Madigas *en masse* in 1985, brutally murdered six men and raped three girls, all because the Madiga labourers had become uppity in recent years.

If this is the main political message that comes through from the pages of this book, there is an aside that a student of ideas will find interesting or at least amusing. This is the peculiar theology, mythology and even some poetry that has collected around this very mundane business of remunerative prices for farm produce. Gandhians vending *satyagraha* as the only mode of struggle appropriate to 'our' culture, critics of science as

per se oppressive, and believers in an absolute form of cultural exclusivity, have rather oddly and most illogically found in these 'peasant' struggles a happy pasture for breeding their ideas. The farmers who want remunerative prices would themselves perhaps not be very much excited by most of these ideas, and indeed would even be hostile to some of them like the partiality for natural as against chemical fertilisers. Indeed, the actual struggles of these 'peasants' have not been particularly Gandhian, whatever advice Ikhakur Das Bang (*Kisan Andolan ka Ran-Niti*) may be pleased to give them. And far from rejecting 'western' culture and science they are well integrated into a pattern of production based on chemical fertilisers, diesel or electric powered machinery and high-yielding varieties of seeds; and a pattern of consumption that imitates that of the *pashchimikrit samaj* - including TV sets, motor vehicles and all the rest of the trappings. Indeed the cultural determinism and exclusivity - leading to a critique of science as *per se* oppressive and exploitative - peddled by the neo-Gandhian disciples of Dharampal is simultaneously the dominant theme of this collection and also the most incongruous one. When Ashok Jhunjhunwala ('Modern Science: A Universal Myth') says that "the farmers' movement today is presenting a new point of view, the reason for our poverty is the domination of urban industrial India over the rural Bharat" he has all these 'farmers' with him. But when he goes on to add in the next paragraph that this point of view has raised many questions, in particular what has been the role of modern science in our country, and then goes on to answer that the role has been one of eroding the self-reliance of the village and concludes that the farmers' struggle may have to be "directed against the whole process of modernization" he is addressing an unsympathetic audience. The 'farmer' wants modern technology, all that he can get, and as cheaply as he can get it. The self-sufficiency of villages has no doubt been eroded by modernisation but as far as the

rural rich are concerned it has increased their wealth and power. It is sheer nonsense to say that “our rural areas [have] hardly benefited materially” from agricultural modernisation. Whatever the gross figures may say - and even this remains controversial - the bigger landholders have benefited a lot. And the farmers’ movement is as much an assertion of their new-found power as it is a demand for still greater benefits. Its authentic tone is that of Sharad Joshi (‘Scrap APC-Demand Farmers’) who has no use for Gandhian *ran-niti*, cultural exclusivity or philosophical opposition to modern science and technology.

This is also perhaps the place to make a few comments upon the attitude of these ideologues towards what they call modern science. Science is many things simultaneously - a body of empirical knowledge, a corpus of techniques, an explanatory system, a method of cognition and an epistemology. It also carries with it a world-view. It has grown and developed within the pores of capitalist society, and carries the birth marks in the kind of facts it has discovered - and forgotten - and most importantly the techniques it has invented. But when these ideologues paint science as oppressive *per se* it is not this reality that they are depicting but a badly distorted version of it. When CV Seshadri and V Balaji (‘Is Science Value-Neutral: A Study in the Notion of Concept as Value and Value as Concept’) put the blame for a range of exploitative and oppressive practices and institutions - from eviction of tribals from forests to the manufacture of alcohol in preference to yeast and the replacement of manure by chemical fertilisers - on the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the absurdity of the distortion becomes patent.

Congress (I) vs Telugu Desam Party:

At last a lawful means for overthrowing a lawfully constituted Government

Judicial activism, hailed by a few, maligned by another few and justly ignored by the rest, has spawned strange progeny. The strangest of them, perhaps, is a writ petition right now lying with the High Court of Andhra Pradesh. Filed by a Congress (I) leader, it asks the court to issue a writ of *quo warranto* to the Chief Minister, N T Rama Rao, questioning his right to continue in office, and a writ of *mandamus* to the Central Government directing it to impose President's rule in the State.

The petition is an interesting and revealing document. It reveals quite a few things on the very surface. It reveals the frustration of the Congress leaders at the injustice of the usurpation of their place by a man whose appetite for power, money and aggrandisement is no less than any Congressman's; whose unprincipled cynicism, nepotism, ruthlessness and corruption are a match for their own; who does everything any Congressman ever did but only more thoroughly and with even less compunction, if that is at all possible; and who, notwithstanding all this, gets counted among the prominent representatives of the democratic forces in the country. More than anything else, it reveals the Congressmen's frustration at their inability to do anything about it. They have tried everything. They have contested elections and tried to get votes, only to discover that NTR could get more; they have tried to

throw bombs and capture booths, only to discover that NTR could throw more and capture more; they have tried to buy NTR's MLAs, only to discover that he could buy back all of them and then some. Finally, they have now come to the court. The ritual submission that the petitioner has tried every other remedy and failed to obtain justice has a sadly authentic ring this time.

But this is only what the surface reveals. A deeper look at the petitioner's contentions reveals much more about the politics and the fractional conflicts of the ruling classes. And it is worth our while taking a deeper look.

The principal contentions of the petition against NTR are: (i) commission of criminal offences like violation of the income tax and wealth tax laws, urban land ceiling regulations, FERA, etc; (ii) corruption, misuse of power, and misappropriation of public funds for personal ends; (iii) casteism, nepotism, and favouritism, especially the filling up of all official nominations with persons close to the Telugu Desam Party, and persons belonging to the Chief Minister's caste; (iv) police atrocities and atrocities against *Harijans*; (v) disrespect towards the courts; and (vi) disrespect towards the Constitution, as evidenced by the anti-Centre tirades of NTR. Some of the substantiating details of the allegations give us the kind of information that would be very difficult for the common citizen of this State to get hold of otherwise. The petitioner coyly describes his occupation as 'agriculture', but that pursuit occupies him, if at all, only *in absentia*. He is an experienced Congress leader of Visakhapatnam, and is currently one of the secretaries of the State Congress (I) Committee, being in charge of the organisation of the party in the coastal districts. His access to information cannot be matched by you and me.

Perhaps the most startling is the information on NTR's violation of ceiling laws and tax laws. It is generally known that NTR is an uncommonly rich man, perhaps one of the richest men in the country in the pre-corporate tradition, and that much more of his wealth is held in 'black' than in white. Even his admirers admit that he is worth at least Rs 200 crore. Much of it is in the form of real estate - urban land, cinema studios, cinema halls and other buildings. This petition puts the value of his real estate holdings alone in Madras and Hyderabad cities at Rs 250 crore. The extent of his land holding in Hyderabad is stated as 1,25,000 sq. metres, worth Rs 35 crore. This excludes an extent of about 70,000 sq. metres acquired by him after coming to power, for the purpose of constructing residences for himself as Chief Minister. In his wealth tax returns, all this land is undervalued to such an extent that "it does not even reflect a fraction of the market value". When the Press people questioned NTR about this matter after the filing of this petition, he is reported to have admitted that according to returns filed by him and his sons, they do possess about 90,000 sq. metres of urban land in Hyderabad, that is to say about 75 per cent of the extent alleged in the petition.

After taking over as Chief Minister, NTR has been nonchalantly acquiring more and more land. The way he has misused power for this purpose is classic, and shows unusual precocity in a man who has barely begun to cut his teeth in politics. Here are two instances from this petition. Soon after coming to power NTR started putting on ochre robes, earrings of vaguely *tantric* significance, a *rudrakshamala* around his throat, and two varieties of pious marks on his forehead, the *Shaivite vibhuti* and the non-sectarian red spot (whose origin perhaps goes back to blood sacrifices to an iconic image). Donning this eclectic apparel, he started describing himself alternatively

as a *sanyasi* and a *rajarshi*. Now, while Hindu dharma allows a *rishi*, who is a *sthita-prajna*, to be a *raja* in times of dire need, whether it also allows a mere *sanyasi* to be one is a doubtful point; and whether a man who belongs to what Manu and *Baudhayana* would have identified as a *sudra* caste can at all be any of these is an even more moot point. However, what NTR did not doubt for a moment was that as a *rishi* he deserved to have a secluded cottage for himself somewhere outside the city, and as a *raja* he deserved to have it paid for out of public funds. He first got 4 acres of land owned by someone near the industrial area of Nacharam exempted from the Urban Land Ceiling Act and then bought that land to join 7 acres of adjoining land owned by a son of his, to make a compact plot of 11 acres. He then put up a cottage for himself in this plot. As that was to be the Chief Minister's residence, the various government department - electricity, roads and buildings and telephones - immediately put up all the infrastructure at public expense. NTR waited for that to be done and then converted the plot into 'Ramakrishna Horticultural Studios', allegedly meant for growing orchards for the purpose of shooting film duets, got the land exempted from ceiling laws (and allegedly transferred an honest IAS officer who refused to give the exemption for the whole of the land), and having thus grabbed 11 acres mostly at public expense, went back to live in his official residence at Abids Road in the heart of the city. He then repeated the same game at Gandipet, another suburb. He built an *ashram* for himself at Gandipet, got it electricity, roads, fencing, etc, at public expense, and then converted it into the State headquarters of his party. He now stays in the city but keeps shuttling between the city and the Gandipet party headquarters, with the public again paying for all this shuttling back and forth accompanied by the enormous security apparatus that has become a must for all political leaders in

India these days. There are several other instances of land-grabbing alleged by this petitioner and the general public: getting exemption under the Urban Land Ceiling Act for a film studio but actually using the land for a shopping complex; forcing the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority and through it the Hyderabad Agricultural Marketing Society to purchase a private party's land at a price that was five times the market rate (in the process allegedly transferring two more uncooperative IAS officers), in return for that gentleman gifting NTR's relatives with 300 acres of land elsewhere in the State; and so on. NTR is an outstanding personality in many respects but in no respect does he stand out as much as he does in land-grabbing. And in the Congressman's plea for justice there is more of envy and chagrin than righteousness, since not even the ablest land-grabber among the Congressmen can hope to equal NTR's record.

When the petitioner turns to tax violations, he is caught in a cruel dilemma. It was his party that introduced the voluntary disclosures schemes under the Income Tax and Wealth Tax Acts. It was undoubtedly meant for the convenience of all members of the ruling class, overburdened as they all are with ill-gotten wealth. Yet, when NTR is learnt to have made a disclosure, in 1985, that he had understated his personal income by Rs 7.5 lakh and his wealth by Rs 50 lakh, the petitioner is aghast at the immorality of the whole thing, that a Chief Minister of a State can 'disclose' voluntarily that he has been telling lies all these days and has now decided to come out with the truth since the liability attached to it has been removed. The petitioner's dilemma here is truly tragic: "It is clear that Sri NT Rama Rao is... a self-confessed criminal though not punishable, in view of the special nature of the scheme and the immunity conferred thereon"; but, he reassures

himself and the court, while the immunity may save him from prosecution, “it cannot cure the criminality of the person”. Having delivered this unctuous curse, he goes on to add that much prior to the disclosure, before NTR had become Chief Minister in fact, a move had been initiated in December 1982 by the government to proceed against him for tax evasion, but with NTR forming a party and coming to power in 1983, the Government of India has avoided prosecution because “for political reasons [it] is afraid of moving in the matter”. He adds the juicy tidbit that he “reliably understands” that when the matter went up to Viswanath Pratap Singh, then Finance Minister, in 1985, he commented that it was “a clear case of wilful concealment”, and yet no prosecution resulted.

Let us leave the Congressman to his hypocrisy and look at the allegations for their political meaning. It is not very relevant whether NTR, as a person, is more corrupt or more aggressively corrupt, than the Congress leaders. The phenomenon that came up as Telugu Desam Party could easily have expressed itself as a faction within the Congress Party. What is relevant is the material essence of the phenomenon, and how that is reflected in this multi-millionaire tycoon who goes on ingesting more and more, that NTR not only represents but is of a class; he is an ‘organic’ leader of the propertied classes, a type that is possible in the modern world only in an incompletely bourgeoisified society like ours, with the separation of civil and political societies being correspondingly incomplete. The class he belongs to is a rural-provincial class that has been one of the principal beneficiaries of the last four decades of development. This class originated in landholding and has interests in agriculture and agro-based trade and small industry, in addition to quarrying, contracts, trade, finance and the tertiary sector in general. It is a new-rich

class, and like any new-rich class it is ruthless and aggressive in its accumulation of property and wealth. It is raising its head all over the country and giving a lot of trouble to the monopoly capitalists, using the idiom of the peasantry, an idiom that gains verisimilitude from its ability to gather the richer sections of the peasantry behind it. Its culture has the general characteristics of the new rich: it is loud, vulgar and bereft of human values. The culture is best seen in Telugu films, which are made, financed and exhibited by this class. It was these films that made NTR, the man and his wealth, and it was from here that he was picked up by the godfathers of his class to lead it in its drive for more power and for a greater realignment of the economy in its favour. His personal corruption merely reflects his social base and political role. The vulgar aggrandisement typical of his class is perhaps more aptly captured by the details given in this petition about the expense incurred by the public for furnishing this man's residence: a total of Rs 7.32 lakh between March 1983 and end of 1984, consisting of Rs 53,000 for electrical fittings, Rs 48,000 for partitions, Rs 18,000 for toilets, Rs 8,000 for crockery, Rs 10,000 for a dining table, Rs 20,000 for 'additional' electrical fittings, Rs 8,000 for barbed wire fencing, Rs 13,000 for door frames, Rs 9,000 for water heating arrangements, Rs 45,000 for painting the walls, Rs 4,000 for cloth for door curtains and another Rs 4,000 for napkins and cutlery. The point is not that a Congress leader would have spent less, the point is really not about individuals or parties.

The next major charge against NTR, that of casteism, must equally be understood against the background of the fractional conflicts of the propertied classes. The plaintive tone of the Congressmen in this matter is just the frustration of the *mansabdars* who have lost out in this round of distribution

of *jagirs* because a new party of favourites has come up at the *Padshah's* Court. From the time of the Delhi Sultanate and its *iqtas*, it has been a characteristic of Indian feudalism that a sizable chunk of the ruling class lives by sponging upon the State, which collects most of the surplus product as revenue. That character has continued down to this day, though naturally in a changed context. The context is officially described as socialistic pattern of society, welfarism or the mixed economy. What it means is that a significant part of society's surplus gravitates to the State, no longer as land revenue but mainly as indirect taxes and created money; and the propertied classes share out this wealth in a variety of ways. Some of them take it as straight cash, much like the *Mansab* holders of Mughal times, and others take it in more complex forms like infrastructural investment, concessions, subsidies and cheap loan capital. The latter form of sharing out is not very visible and easily passes for 'development', but the former is glaringly visible and gets periodically flogged by a strange combination of critics: those who are left out in the sharing, and those who are addicted to either liberal economic theory or unctuous political morality.

Charges of nepotism and casteism levelled by the Congressmen against NTR are essentially the complaints of aspiring sharers left out in the sharing. When the petitioner complains that "all political plums are given to the Kammas" and that "the Reddy community is persecuted and harassed", one can either take the complaint at face value, or one can read into it the anguish of the gentry of the Telangana, Rayalaseema and the non-delta coastal districts who feel deprived at the expense of their rivals of the Krishna delta; or, more generally, the frustration of the class-fractions that had gathered around the Congress and who now feel the ground being pulled from

under their feet by their rival fractions that have created or gathered around the Telugu Desam Party. That such complex class or fractional conflict is perceived in terms of caste has less to do with empirical veracity of the allegations than with the *political* need to rouse the ‘rabble’ of one’s caste against a rival fraction. That is to say, when Telugu Desam rule is described by the Congress as Kamma rule, it is more important to go into the political need and the sociological possibility of the description than to take a caste-count of ministers and holders of nominated offices. That the petitioner, who does take a caste-count of the nominations to the dozens of boards, committees, corporations, societies, councils, trusts, agencies and public sector undertakings, discovers triumphantly that most of the nominees are Telugu Desam people of the Kamma caste, which he thinks is proof that “all the posts are given to the Chief Minister’s caste-men” and that “he patronises only one caste, i.e., the Kammas”, does not by any means imply that this is his real grouse or that this is the political essence of the matter. It only means that this way of perceiving and trumpeting reality is, in the first place, politically - that is to say for purposes of “mass mobilization” - the most advantageous one for the section of this State’s rich who are not as close to the present government as they would like to be; secondly, given the fact that the land-holding castes - unlike the Brahmins, *Harijans*, traders and artisans - are regionally concentrated and can therefore be identified superficially with class-fractions, the perception carries more apparent veracity, and is therefore of considerable practical utility. To put it simply, the Reddy gentry of Telangana and Rayalaseema need the argument that this is Kamma rule and the Reddys are persecuted, to gather the Reddy peasants behind them, which is essential whether for gang fights or elections. And the regional concentration of the castes makes the argument possible and plausible.

Another major charge of the petitioner is the ultimate in what is usually called the ‘criminalisation of politics’: the appointment of persons involved in serious, criminal cases as ministers. Mention is made of two new entrants to the Cabinet, Sivaprasada Rao, who is now the Home Minister, and Siva Reddy, Labour Minister. The two of them are quite notorious for their goondaism. Sivaprasada Rao, a surgeon from Guntur district, has a penchant for leading riotous mobs against his opponents. In the single year of 1984, he was accused of seven criminal charges, one of them assault on a police officer. And this year, on June 26, just a couple of weeks before his induction into the Cabinet, he led a major assault on Congress (I) supporters in the village of Dechavaram, an assault that left 40 houses and 80 hay-stacks gutted and one man dead. To take such a man into the Cabinet and to give him the Home of all portfolios, requires uncommon contempt for matters like democracy and rule of law; in fact, it requires just the kind of contempt that NTR has. The other incumbent, Siva Reddy of Jammalamadugu, Cuddappah district, is perhaps even more notorious. So deeply is he involved in the murderous faction-fights his district is famous for that he has officially been given four armed police bodyguards to accompany him wherever he goes. During the Municipal Corporation elections at Hyderabad, on February 15, 1986, this gentleman and his associates, accompanied by the armed guards, indulged in a booth-capturing spree armed with deadly weapons that included not only country-made bombs and ordinary guns but also a telescopic rifle. They fired with their guns, threw the bombs and injured people at will. He is now the State’s Labour Minister!

It may be left to the court to decide upon the Constitutionality of a government, two of whose ministers

are accused in serious criminal cases. What is more important is to see the source of this criminalisation in increasingly vicious conflicts between sections of the rich. The reason for this escalation is two-fold. The first and the most important is the inevitable internecine conflict of the propertied classes over the sharing of social surplus, which becomes more and more severe as the number of competitors and their aggressiveness increase. The two worthies recently inducted to the AP Cabinet were involved, not in crimes of a personal nature, but in crimes of rioting and assault of one gang against another or against the general public. For the Dechavaram assault led by the present Home Minister occurred in the aftermath of the recent elections to the agricultural co-operatives, which saw unprecedented levels of violence. The second and related reason is the general crisis of stagnation that has hit the world economy hard and has cut down the size of the cake which everyone wants a share of. Thus the 'criminalisation' of politics is something that has come to stay and perhaps even grow, and it is not clear what a writ of *quo warranto* can do about it.

The last major complaint of the petition concerns the general increase in the establishment's violence - deaths in police custody, deaths in faked 'encounters', deaths in drought-hit areas due to starvation caused by official negligence and 'atrocities on *Harijans*'. It is a pleasure of a sort to find that ruling class politicians are today driven to accept that such things are material for declaring a government unconstitutional. The petitioner quotes unabashedly and extensively from a Telugu booklet published by the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee to recount the saga of atrocities in NTR's regime. About 85 CPI (ML) activists and their sympathisers have been killed in 'encounters', more than nine-tenths of them fake, since NTR came to power, and this Congressman gives no

hint to the court that when his party ruled the State, more than 400 such deaths took place, nor that in less exigent circumstances he and his party would be the first to swear that the victims deserved their fate. Such is the power of material necessity. In addition to these political victims, during the last two years and nine months, about 75 persons, mostly petty criminal suspects, have been beaten and tortured to death in police custody. Incidents of 'atrocities on *Harijans*' are on the increase, with the involvement of close relatives of men in power.

With these 'atrocities' we can sum up the picture we have described in pieces above. The rise of aggressive new rich classes aspiring for more power and for a realignment of the economic structure in their favour, increasing fractional conflict among the propertied classes which takes all conceivable forms from gang fights in villages to NTR's anti-Centre rhetoric (which is one of the 'unconstitutional' acts the petitioner complains about), and a consequent unfolding of a culture of violence and lawlessness, lead inevitably to 'atrocities' on the toiling masses and their activists, either by the police or the landlords. Small wonder that, given the ineluctability of the phenomenon, NTR does nothing to either curb it or to punish the guilty, in spite of a gathering pile of judicial inquiry reports on cases of police killing. And here we do know that writs issued by courts are of little use, since civil liberties organisations have frequently approached the courts in these matters and in return have at best got infructuous inquiries, and at worst abusive rejoinders from the government.

EPW, 10.10.1987

APPENDIX

An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied Class - II

I was reviewing a book and not the activities of the Shetkari Sanghatana (*EPW*, September 5-12). I do not think I referred to that organisation even once in the review; Sharad Joshi is mentioned only because there is an article of his in the book and my comment was only on his article, and not on the movement he leads. What I was trying to convey in the review is that we are witnessing the consolidation of a certain class in the ‘districts’, the class which I have, with deliberate vagueness, called the ‘provincial propertied class’ as I do not wish to use the more usual variant, the ‘regional bourgeoisie’ because of all that the expression conveys in the light of European history. And I was trying to say that the opinions expressed in the articles under review collectively constitute an ideology that perfectly suits the consolidation of this class. This is not, by itself, a comment on the “farmers’ movements”, though there is much that one can say about those movements in the light of this understanding.

However, I will not try to evade with this statement the obligation to put on record my political views regarding the important points raised by Gail Omvedt and Chetna Gala (*EPW*, November 7). Moral obligation apart, it is necessary that we discuss these issues because they are central to any breakthrough in the stagnant conditions of the Indian revolution. (The fact that I say *the* Indian revolution is itself a

political opinion and not just a conventional expression, as Omvedt and Gala will be the first to point out.)

Contradiction among the people?

To begin at a convenient point, I do not think that Karamchedu represents a ‘contradiction among the people’. The point is not proved by counting the number of the dead and the raped; the fact that six men and three women suffered these fates, respectively, does not by itself mean that it is not a contradiction among the people. I am aware of this. But, equally, the point is not proved the other way around by computing the landholding statistics of the assailants. It has always been the poor who have fought the battles of the rich. All the world’s armies have been made up of half starved men who have left half starved families behind. That these foot soldiers are not enemies of each other is obvious in the case of mercenary and professional armies, but it is equally true of men who have gone on a rampage under the thrust of a conviction, whether the conviction consists of religious bigotry, caste arrogance or feudal attachment to a landlord.

In other words, it is true that most of the assailants of Karamchedu (and all Karamchedus) are what one may loosely call ‘middle peasants’. That this should not happen, that they do not belong to the other side, is a point on which we are all unanimous. But how to bring them over to this side is a question that, to begin with, hinges on our understanding of what they are doing on the other side in the first place. There are two possible answers to this: one, the middle peasants, exploited through unequal terms of trade and uneven investment of resources by the urban capitalists (including the imperialists) and the State, take it out on the dalits by beating them up and killing them once in a while. In Karamchedu, for example, unremunerative tobacco cultivation can be said to have caused

the killing. The analogy which Omvedt and Gala draw with the oppressed worker taking it out on his hapless wife is apt as far as it goes. If we take *this* as the essence of the matter - and only if we do - it becomes a contradiction among the people. It becomes a peasant vs labourer contradiction, and any other class that may exist in rural India is irrelevant to our understanding of these conflicts. It is also irrelevant that whereas tobacco is grown all over Guntur and Prakasam districts, the only two villages where murderous attacks have taken place in recent times (Karamchedu in Prakasam and Neerukonda in Guntur) are native villages of rich and influential men in the State's power structure: NTR's son-in-law in one case and a Minister of his Cabinet in the other.

And then, of course, the only political line open to us is to unite the peasants and the labourers against big capital, the State and imperialism. Of course, there can still be differences on many other questions: do we envisage a revolutionary alternative or a more humane settlement of the terms of existing social relations? If the former, then what is the nature of the alternative we seek? What is the strategy of the struggle? Under whose (class) leadership the struggle will take place? and so on. But, whichever we choose, there will be a general de-emphasising of wage and land struggles, because they tend to divide rather than unite the landless and the landed. Instead, issues like remunerative prices - with the promise that labourers will get better wages once the farmers get better prices - for agricultural produce, anti-State issues like irrigation, drought and social amenities, and anti-capital issues like high cost and inappropriate technology, deforestation and destruction of the environment, will be taken up. And attempts will be made to overcome existing divisions between the landless and the landed; for instance, casteism will become a 'central question' as Omvedt and Gala emphasise.

This is one possible answer to our dilemma. To seek a second answer is not to reject the importance of any of the individual issues enumerated above; it is not the issues of agitation that we are quarrelling about, but the political perspective of the agitation. To seek a second answer, then, we should first stop thinking of rural India in terms of peasant and labourer. It is not enough to modify this by identifying an 'upper section' of the rich peasantry, or granting magnanimously that there do exist landlords in benighted places like Bihar. We have to look at what is a very real class, which cannot be called 'peasant' - rich or super rich - by any stretch of one's imagination. This class cannot be specified exclusively in terms of landlords, though it has emerged through a further development of the landlord class. To this day a major part of its interests are in landholding but it straddles the rural and the non-monopoly urban economy.

This class is finding itself starved of avenues and means of enrichment (not necessarily investment). Profitable cultivation, without which it is deprived of resources, both in the form of its own surplus accumulation in its own fields, and in the form of rural 'household savings' which it handles through a variety of formal and informal, legal and illegal, financing arrangements, is a matter of concern to this class. Its other concern is with the resources superintended by the State, which are perceived as being employed lopsidedly for the benefit of monopoly capital, both because of the closeness of dominant sections of the Congress party to the monopolists and because of the very nature of our economic structure.

The natural constituency of this class is the village. It is only if it can consolidate the village behind it that it can win its battle against monopoly capital and the State. It is felicitous in

the use of the peasant idiom, it is heir to a feudal tradition of a leader's role in the village, and some of the peasant concerns are of concern to it too. The better-off sections of the peasantry therefore fall in line, aided further by the fact that caste usually functions as a common link between the two classes, though there are plenty of conflicts between them, too. But the real difficulty comes with the rural poor - landless and poor peasants. Their concerns are different and distinct from those of the rural rich and often in conflict with them to boot. Caste acts as a further dividing factor. This is where the need for the ideology of village unity comes in, and this is where the need to put down the rural poor brutally once in a while comes in. The feudal subordination of the middle peasantry to the provincial rich, links of caste, and a partial commonality of economic interests, help in creating an army of foot soldiers from out of the middle peasantry to put down the poor. *This is the essential meaning of the Karamchedus of contemporary India.* These are not conflicts among the people, but politically necessary assaults upon the rural poor in the course of the consolidation of the dominance of a major fraction of India's exploiting classes.

If this answer is accepted, how do we face the situation? How do we build the 'alliance of popular forces'? Do we build them at all and why? These questions have no meaning, let alone an answer, outside a political framework. I have to state my framework, not because it is new, but because it probably answers to the description of the 'one-point programmes' which Omvedt and Gala are critical about. It is the traditional Marxist framework of capture of State power by the working people in order to build socialism and transform society towards the stage of Communism. In India's context, 80 per cent of the revolutionary masses will be the rural poor and landless

peasants. When we talk of alliances, it is alliances for their revolution and alliances for them that we mean.

Enemy of the Masses

The class of the provincial rich is an enemy of the masses along with imperialism and big capital. And the rural poor, the core of the revolutionary masses, must be organised first and foremost against this class in the struggle for their liberation. All other struggles of the rural people - like for instance the middle peasantry's struggle for more equitable terms of trade - must be *structured strategically and tactically into this struggle.* It is only through the struggle against this class that the masses will meet with and contend against big capital and imperialism in a *revolutionary* way. Any other way of organising the poor directly against big capital and imperialism will be either an infructuous attempt or at best a reformist programme. In plainer language, you cannot organise the rural poor directly around issues like drought, deforestation or exploitation by urban capital in a *revolutionary* way. These issues have to be built into a struggle that is structured around a fight against their immediate oppressors, the landlords in their present manifestation.

To my mind, this is one of the principal ideas taught by the CPI-ML movement, and one of the many crucial points that distinguish it from the 'grassroots radical movements' that are being heralded a lot today. And whatever else of the Naxalbari heritage that we may like to discard, this much cannot be discarded. The question still arises: how does one structure the middle peasantry's demands into this line, how does one form an alliance with it, and how does one prevent the middle peasants from acting as foot soldiers of the provincial rich? How to breach the caste barrier is part of this question. If I may be allowed to coin an aphorism, caste cannot be fought

by fighting caste. Nor can it be fought by the idealistic inculcation of secular values, which is-at best-the method tried by the two parliamentary Communist parties. Caste-and I say this at the risk of sounding terribly old-fashioned-can only be fought through class struggles.

Rather than go on like an oracle, let me try to elaborate on the basis of the (admittedly very limited) experience of the CPI-ML groups in Andhra Pradesh. I must add (since some people have described me as a spokesperson for the CPI-ML groups) that these are my observations and I do not know whether the groups would agree with me. The groups have been functioning basically in two kinds of areas - plains and forests. In the plains areas they have faced this problem of uniting the rural poor and the middle peasants, often transcending the barrier of caste. In the forests, where a sizeable number of non-tribal small peasants have settled down alongside the tribals, they have faced the problem of uniting the tribals and the non-tribal poor. Whatever success they have achieved has been obtained, not by taking up directly middle class peasant issues like remunerative prices in parallel with landless labourers' issues, nor by fighting 'caste', but (i) by building a widespread and militant movement among the poorest classes, demonstrating this strength in actual struggles with the rural rich and the State and thus, *on the basis of their strength*, winning over the middle peasantry; and (ii) by educating and organising the middle peasantry to take up the fight against the landlords, who oppress them through feudal social dominance and through the control over rural credit, marketing and the political and economic structures of 'development'. The fight against big capital and the State has been generally taken up as a further development of this fight against the rural rich. This, it seems to me, is the only revolutionary way

of winning over the rural middle classes to an ‘alliance of popular forces’. In view of the brutal repression on the CPI-ML movement in Andhra Pradesh, and the intervention of caste carnages in Bihar, the feasibility of this line except to a limited extent and in a limited area, is being questioned.

I have no ready-made reply, except to reiterate that there is no other *revolutionary* way of handling the situation, though there probably are many meaningful ways of reacting to it if one is willing to settle for something less than a revolution. And perhaps, instead of searching for admirable qualities of democratic organisation in middle class movements, our time would be better spent if we sought for the right tactics, forms of struggle and forms of organisation for sustaining a militant movement of the rural poor until it reaches the strength required to attract the middle classes to itself, and for sustaining a struggle of the middle peasants against the provincial rich, which is much more difficult than building anti-capital and anti-State middle peasant movements. The failure of the CPI-ML movement is the failure to find the right answer to this question, and it has not been helped by the large-scale desertion of intellectuals who hailed it to the skies when the weather was fair.

Farmer’s Movements

We can now conclude with the ‘farmer’s movements’. I will take it that we are talking of the movements of those peasants to whom the quotation from “The Civil War in France” given by Omvedt and Gala applies. The quotation has no relevance whatsoever to the provincial rich, I will grant for the sake of debate that the Shetkari Sanghatana represents such peasants.

That these peasants have a genuine cause, and that it deserves the sympathy of all democrats, is beyond argument. But that is to say nothing about how one reacts to them politically. There is a middle peasant class, but there can be no middle peasant politics. What appears as middle peasant politics is an ephemeral phenomenon that has got to choose sooner or later between the rural rich and the poor. And so long as their outlook is that ‘the main exploiters of the peasants are the urban capitalists and the State’ the class is naturally impelled to choose the former. On the other hand, the middle peasantry that is exploited by the urban capitalists through unequal terms of trade is oppressed in many ways by the provincial elite which dominates not only the village society but also the regional trade, marketing, credit and business. But the feudal hold this class has over the middle peasantry makes a struggle against it difficult. A farmers’ movement that obfuscates this reality by exclusively focusing on agricultural prices and costs is a farmers’ movement that is ready for being co-opted into the elite’s army. That farmers’ movement is against the ‘alliance of popular forces’. It is from this perspective that one is critical of the farmers’ movements. Not everyone may agree with me, but it seems to me that the question “where is the ‘rich peasant’ leadership and where is the ‘proletarian’ leadership” is settled by analysis at this level, and not by forms of organisation or the attitude adopted towards women. Even there, if the Shetkari Sanghatana has taken a stand in favour of equal property rights for women and the Rytu Coolie Sangham (RCS) has not, that is only a reflection of the nature of the classes they organise. To most members of the RCS, property rights are a largely irrelevant matter. They fight for land, but their fight has not had the kind of success where they have to discuss who will inherit the land. Actually, wherever they have managed

to wrench some land from a landlord or the government they have been cultivating it in common by co-operative effort.

The right question to have asked at Warangal would have been whether the RCS is fighting for equal wages to men and women for equal work. The answer is mixed. For work of the same type they have fought for and got equal wages, but they have not been able to articulate and establish the principle that work of the same duration must get the same wage. As a consequence, work that is done predominantly (but not exclusively) by women, like transplanting and weeding paddy fields, is paid less than work that is normally done by men. And a legitimate critique would lie here.

EPW, 12.12.1987

About Perspectives

The future of humanity is the subject of much debate and discussion today. It is a characteristic of Progressive thought that it desires a society free from inequality and oppression. But there is no consensus among progressive thinkers about the contours of such a society. The debate that took a definitive shape with Marx is yet to reach a conclusion. As history brings to the fore ever new forms of and even new points of view about - inequality and oppression, the debate is taking a more incisive shape. And is also becoming more complicated. As some of the newly uncovered manifestations of inequality and oppression are in fact quite old, the legitimate question why they have been invisible to progressive thinkers till today comes to the fore, and adds some heat to the debate.

Persons of diverse viewpoints and diverse political struggles are joining the debate. Some are focussing on hitherto invisible forms of oppression and inequality; some insist that current revolutionary philosophies are incapable of accounting for them; some believe that the attempt to set up new areas of oppression as subjects of political theory and practice is a diversionary exercise; some believe that revolutionary 'theory' and 'organisation' are in themselves a hindrance to human progress; some believe that all the attempts at progress that have hitherto taken place are a colossal waste of effort; some believe that lessons can be learnt from the successes and failures of these attempts; some are participants in political struggles; some have nothing to do with political practice. Such are the varied hues of the participants of this debate.

PERSPECTIVES has a certain view point regarding this debate. From times as ancient as that of the Buddha,

philosophers have thought and theorised about human society. They have set up unquestionable ideas as the goals of human society. They have indicated the means of attaining the goals. It was Marx who gave this search a rational basis and stood it on its feet. Ever since Marx, the debate has centred on his ideas and his theory of progress. Those who accept them, those who would revise them and those who reject them have all equally taken his ideas as their point of departure. The current debate that has surfaced with the changes in the erstwhile Soviet Union, China and East Europe is no exception to this. And we believe that in future too no debate about human social transformation can ignore Marxism.

And yet it cannot be said that Marxism has satisfactorily overcome all its theoretical and practical problems. Indeed, even as old problems are tackled, new challenges to Marxism are coming forth and reinterpretations or alternatives to Marxism are being proposed. The debate about Marxism is part of the larger radical debate about social transformation.

It is the aim of PERSPECTIVES to provide a forum for all the trends and all the view points in this debate about social transformation, without prejudging any viewpoint. Any idea that opposes inequality and oppression is a democratic idea, a progressive idea. And the differences beyond this basic commonality must necessarily be heard, studied and debated. In this sense, PERSPECTIVES believes that the *call* -

Let hundred flowers blossom

Let hundred schools of thought contend

- issued by Mao at a certain point of Chinese history has general validity and meaning. It is with that understanding that PERSPECTIVES undertakes its publications.

K Balagopal

It is our aim to further the ongoing 'Great Debate' by publishing competently written works with a broadly democratic viewpoint, principally in Telugu, but also in English.

K Balagopal

Hyderabad (A.P.)
January 1995

PERSPECTIVES
Social Sciences/Literature

The author has been an activist of Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC_ from 1981. APCLC has been in the forefront of the struggle for safeguarding civil liberties and democratic rights in the country, especially in Andhra Pradesh. Activists of APCLC have been arrested, tortured and killed by the Police. The author has also shared this repression with his colleagues.

He has been a regular contributor to Economic and Political Weekly, as well as Telugu publications like Srujana and Arunatara, on topics connected with Civil Liberties, Politics, Philosophy, Literature and History. He has written a book in Telugu introducing D.D. Kosambi's analysis of ancient Indian History.

He holds a doctorate in Mathematics and was at the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi, for two years as a Senior Research Fellow, and taught Mathematics at Kakatiya University, Warangal, for four years.

PUBLISHERS



PERSPECTIVES

SOCIAL SCIENCES / LITERATURE

RS. 50/-