

factory must be improved with safety regulations being implemented especially strictly in plants handling radio-activity.

(3) The Health Physics Units must be given independent authority free of control by the local administration,

(4) Medical check-ups must include specialised investigation for the various chemical and physical agents handled and the findings must be made known to workers along with appropriate advice and treatment.

## ANDHRA PRADESH

# Peasant Struggle and Repression in Peddapally

K Balagopal

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 De vender 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 'Siuarani 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 stendy sucam of forries one rarely sees more than a few carrying bags of paddy or mirchi (chillies) - such a common

(5) Health studies must be conducted on the general public to assess the effects of pollution. Appropriate measures for treatment and decontamination must be taken where necessary.

A thorough investigation into the various problems outlined above and dissemination of the findings of this investigation be made to the general public and scientific and governmental agencies so that a general debate may take place on the relevance of Nuclear Technology.

sight in the Vijayawada-Guntur-Elur 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 shows 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 [agtlia who owns about 18 bus routes plying along kuchha roads joining villages to towns like Ramagundam,

Peddapally and Dharmaram. He is said to bribe PWD people into keeping the roads kuchha 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.

But this alone does not capture the full picture of feudalism in Peddapally. An equally important element is vetti or *vetti chakiri* (corvee; 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 sou have a complete picture of Peddapally — not in the days of the Nizamshahi 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 Warantai, Nalgonda and Khainmam 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 Kanna. The organisation that conducts the struggle is the Rytu-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 waste-land 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 waste-land 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 farmers. 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, lavings, 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 'revisionist's')

All this came later, of course. The first struggle in Ranapuram and Kanna, led by Devender Reddy (a native of Ranapuram), then a lean and dutiful looking college drop-out, was for occupation of 300 acres of waste-land appropriated by the landlords. The success of this struggle led to the people of Palitem. Dongaturti, Ramayapalle, Raechapalle 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; people from 15 villages went to his house, caught hold of his two sons, and held him to ransom; 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 Bnoomaiah and Kishta Goud, who were executed during the Emergency, are well known. Bnoomaiah belonged to Putnur and his niece 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 waste-land 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 Milage: it is still to be removed. At Kukkalagudur, landlord and PWD contractor Rajaiah (one-time CPI Sarpanch of the village) starred 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 starving 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 bass 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 Takkellapally 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 Kesornm cement factory (owned by the Birla?) near Takkellapally, 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 Takkellapally. He was thrown over the "round 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 — loading and unloading cement bags.

But none of these 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 hundred, red flags in hand, to plant the flags in waste/surplus land and till it against all odds. Near Takkellapally 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 Palakurthi, have 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. (Struggle for increased wages has also been there; 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 after-thought 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 Chintalapally, 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: at nearby Guruvapally, 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 oalmyra 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, 'land-ceilings 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 (munsab) 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 over-powered from behind and killed. The story that his own revolver went off during the scuffle and filled him is obvious nonsense. With the increasing clamour of civil liberties groups about bogus encounters, the police have changed their track; 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.