

Excerpts from the *Memoirs of Death*

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He woke up suddenly, prodded by a policeman's stick. There were five of them now in the cell, all in plainclothes and carrying sten guns... They were evidently drunk, but there was more than intoxication in their looks. There was rage an animal rage.. - Next day the superintendent of police was preparing for a press conference where he would give the full details of the attempted mining of the police, jeep, and the ensuing encounter with the naxalites which lasted two hours and a total of 300 rounds, leaving one unidentified naxalite dead.

THE blood running down his face blinded his eyes. The gash on his forehead bled a lot but it did not pain much as yet and he could think clearly enough. Perhaps the pain would start later. The jeep lurched along and he was pressed between the backrest of the drivers seat on the right and a policeman—one of the ten or eleven who had packed themselves into the jeep—on the left. The policeman squirmed occasionally seeking a more comfortable position but was silent. All of them were silent. These men, they must be of the Special Task Force he thought, were not like the 'khakhi-clad constables one saw during the day at the 'thana' at Atmakur. Those were garrulous and talked and swore a lot. These were different. They were silent, silent in an ugly way, ugly like the new-fangled rifles they cradled in their arms. Their silence was made worse by the only sound they emitted apart from occasional wheezing: the incomprehensible whispers they exchanged over the shoulders, and which he strained his ears to catch. There can be nothing more terrifying, he had realised the last time they abducted him, than a captive's fruitless effort to understand the captors' whispers.

But he tried, nevertheless. He wanted to know one thing if he could. The 'kuchcha' road leading out of his village would soon come to an end, and they would reach the main road a little to the south of Gudeppad. Would they then turn right or left, he wanted to know. Right or left? If they turned right that meant he would be taken to Warangal. Not that he was very safe there but he felt better nevertheless at the very possibility. For if they turned left that meant Mulug or Etur-nagaram in the Godavari valley, and he felt a Chill run down his spine at the thought.

The road, he noted absent-mindedly, was better than it used to be. But of course it would be. It was he and his friends in the village that had forced the 'sarpanch' to repair this road with the Rojgar funds. The repair was partly completed. Left to himself the sarpanch wanted to use the funds for some other fancy idea of his, like beautifying the gram panchayat office, but he and his friends had not allowed it. They had cornered the sarpanch in the gram panchayat

office one day and forced him to allot the funds for getting this road repaired. They were perhaps rather harsh on him, he had had occasion to think later in retrospect. That is what his father had said to him the day after the event.. You could have called him out and held a proper referendum in the village, his father had said, but instead you caught him by the collar, abused him and threatened him. You even threatened to report the matter to Komuranna, the leader of the 'dalam', the armed squad of the naxalites that operated in the area. Perhaps that was so. His friends had however disagreed with his father. Did we not have umpteen such meetings and discussions in the past, they had asked, and were they of any use until the dalam came along? Perhaps that was also true. He had always had difficulty following political arguments. All that he knew was that the people had appreciated what he and his friends had done. They had lauded them and said it was such youth the country needed.

The jeep started bumping again. The repaired road had come to an end. His thoughts turned to the present. He had been a fool not to have gone away like most of his friends had. One of them had joined the Komuranna dalam. Even if he died some day he would have a weapon to defend himself. The others had all gone away, to Hyderabad, to Thane, to Surat and god knows where else. Excepting one, his closest friend. That one had died a horrible death. He and twelve others from villages near Jangaon and Ghanpur. His friend had told him one day that it was all arranged, they were taking a van from Jangaon, crossing the state's border near Bhadrachalam and going off to Bastar. He has been careful not to ask what for. It was better not to know such things. He himself had decided that enough was enough and he would lead a normal life. But they did not cross Bhadrachalam anyway. They were caught by the police on the way. Was it on January 5 or 6? Late on the fifth night, perhaps. They were gunned down on the sixth in the evening. They were taken to the jungle near Pagideru. That was also in Khammam district, like Bhadrachalam, but much more to the east. He had been there

once. It was a beautiful place. A huge tank with a strong mud bund that was the only road from hamlet to hamlet and lush green paddy fields and the thickest of forests all round. The thirteen youth (one of them was a woman from near Mothe in Nalgonda) were taken to a spot near this beautiful village and gunned down. The next day's papers carried the story with screaming headlines. The biggest encounter in the state's history. Thirteen heavily armed naxalites killed. A whole dalam wiped out. Attempt to landmine police van backfires. Remarkable exhibition of courage and fortitude by the police. That was the rank rubbish put out by the police and published by the papers. He had read it and worried about the number. Was it his friend's party? They were also thirteen. But they were supposed to be travelling in a van: What had happened to the van? Where had they been caught? it took but a day or two to know the details. The papers themselves soon published the truth. About the van, the arrests and the gunning down of the unarmed youth. Three days later, the van was found in a ditch way beyond Bhadrachalam and the driver too was dead. The brutes had killed the driver too and pushed him and his van into a ditch.

With a sudden shift of rhythm the jeep got onto the main road and turned sharply to the right. That meant it was going to Warangal. He breathed a tittle easier and allowed his muscles to relax. His head was beginning to ache. He had been absent-mindedly pressing his shirt sleeves to the gash and the flow of blood had almost stopped. But his head was aching and so were his eyes.

It is easy to decide that enough is enough but very difficult to stick to the decision, he had learnt by experience. At least for him. Last time he was arrested, much before things had descended to the present level of darkness, he had decided to give up all activity and live what was called a normal life. When things were going well he regarded that expression with contempt, but in times such as this he felt a terrible longing for that normal life. His father had two acres and a few cents of land, a thatched house and some cattle. He himself had dropped out of school the year his father had had a belly operation but was not lacking in aptitude and could with some effort get back to studies; or more easily, he could settle down as one more discontented small farmer, like his father was. It would be nice if things were not so and nobody needed to drop out of school or lead a disgruntled existence, but he had been very naive to believe that merely because equity was a just cause, the struggle for it would be applauded by everyone. It took him some time and a lot of shock to realise that it was not so. In the beginning things were different. In his village there was no very big landlord. Barring the sarpanch and a few others who had about twenty-five acres of land and some business

besides at Atmakur and Parkal, all the rest were hard-working people. Communism and communists they had heard of and seen for a long time and it was during his school days that they had heard first of these new communists called naxalites. Many villages around were rumoured to have naxalites among their youth, which he later learnt to be true; but at first he had not taken the rumour seriously, for he knew the local youth and what they were capable of. They knew how to ride a buffalo, how to tend a crop of 'jowar' or 'mirchi' and how to water a strip of paddy if you showed them a well nearby, but become naxalites—oh, no!

It was during the summer before the last that the whole district was agog with talk about an impending meeting of naxalites near Warangal. The government, people said, has relaxed its attitude and would allow them to hold a meeting. People talked about nothing but that meeting during those days and almost the whole of his village went there. So did he, of course. He did not understand much of what was going on there. The stage was far off and the loudspeakers were indistinct. There was such a huge crowd, lakhs and lakhs of them. And to cap it all there was a sudden storm of the kind that you sometimes have at the height of summer. He had had a glimpse of the legendary singer Gaddar but could comprehend little else, and yet it was in a mood of elation that he came home that night.

Things changed a lot in the villages afterwards. It was principally a change of attitude at first. In village after village the youth of poor families suddenly took charge of life. They decided everything. They set the wage rates, they settled social disputes, they decided how much of each farmer's land was in excess of legitimate needs and could be taken over by the poor, they decided so many things, they were the 'kotwali', the 'panchayat' and the 'adaalat' rolled into one. Behind them, aiding and advising them, were the dalams and the naxalite leaders who were mostly born in such villages as his and to such parents as his and therefore knew what was what. It was a great time, it was like the dawn of a new world. A lot of good things were done in village after village, a lot of land was taken over by the poor and a lot of injustice set right. Of course some bad things had happened, some downright nasty mistakes were made. Often youth such as he were a little too brutal and a little too cocksure, but all said and done it was a thrilling time. Now that he looked back, what struck him was the way power and authority shifted from the hands of those who had exercised it for centuries and those whom the law had vested it with, and into the hands of the lowly, the unspeakable, the wretches of this land. All that was good about what they did, and all that was criticised as too brutal or immature, stemmed from this.

The change could not last very long, of

course, perhaps they had been foolish not to see that. His father had warned him—again and again. I know the world, he had said, I know the ways of the powerful. They are ruthless, you boys do not know how ruthless the brutes are. His friends had sneered at his father. He himself had not, for he knew his father to be an intelligent and courageous man, and yet he too was infected by the mood of his friends. Or perhaps by his own innocence. His own inexcusable innocence, he had recently had occasion to think bitterly. The innocence that believed that because what one did appeared self-evidently just to oneself, as plain as two and two makes four, it should appear equally just to everybody else. The innocence that believed that only the very unreasonable and the very wicked, who are in a minority in the world, could be against one. The innocence that just could not conceive of the possibility that a large number of otherwise perfectly normal people could oppose this evidently just struggle. Considering the facts—as he perceived them, of course—was he really to be blamed? The Earth belonged to no one, and yet a few people had parcelled out large chunks of it among themselves. Now the rest were demanding their share. Was that not plainly just? Some people in towns—like that university professor who had migrated from his village—earned fat salaries that amounted to Rs 200 a day, and the poor who could not make Rs 20—wife and husband together—a day wanted more. That too was plainly just was it not? The sense of morality, of right and wrong, is evidently evenly distributed among human beings, and yet a few had for ages been claiming the monopoly of wisdom, the exclusive privilege of deciding right and wrong, and the rest had silently suffered their wisdom. Now they too claimed that privilege, and that too was plainly just, was it not? Power had been always wielded by men of the right castes who had the right quantity of land, but it is self-evident, is it not, that there is no reason why it should be so, and that all persons are equally capable or incapable of exercising power? Of course it is, or so it had seemed to him.

And yet it evidently was not, as he had learnt painfully that time he was abducted from his house the same way as today and taken to the dark and stocky deputy superintendent of police at Mulug. He had argued these self-evident truths with that man for long hours, and had finally broken down and wept. He had wept at the unreason of it. He would weep later for rjior physical reasons but at first it was the sheer unfairness of it all that made him weep. Six days in captivity—it could have been longer but some civil liberties people had intervened and put an end to his captivity—and he had been rid of much of his innocence. He had realised that certain things could be self-evidently true and acknowledged as such by everyone, and yet it could be wrong, fatally

wrong, to act on the truth. Nobody would deny the justice, of what you said, and yet you would be tortured and tormented.

Six days and much brutal torture later he had been taken to the court at Warangal. They had charged him with five crimes. He had been arrested the previous evening, they had said, on the outskirts of Hanamkonda and a grenade and seditious literature had been found on him (false). He had participated in a 'People's Court' in his village and beaten black and blue a man who had deserted his wife and child (well—almost true, for though he had not actually beaten him he had approved of the beating). He had led a mob of 72 landless labourers armed with lethal weapons to occupy 25 acres of the land of an absentee landlord in a neighbouring village (true enough, but they had had no lethal weapons with them, only sticks and other implements). He had, along with some others, set on fire an RTC bus in protest against an 'encounter' killing and had threatened to kill the driver and conductor if they resisted (the arson part of it was true enough, though he had, that being his first experience, done more damage to his own skin than to the bus, but nobody had threatened the crew—it had not been necessary). And he had joined the Komuranna dalam to kidnap the president of Atmakur Mandal Prajaparisad (false).

It was in a chastened and desolate mood that he had stood before the court. All the charges were under TADA and there was little likelihood of his getting bail within six months. As he stood gazing at the distant judge and played nervously with the chains on his wrists, his heart continued to burn at the injustice of it, though he was already wise enough to know that there was little he could do about it. There was nothing wrong about what he had done, and yet look how they were punishing him. He knew of men—including ML As and ministers—who had grabbed the land of the poor and beaten them for protesting; he knew of excise contractors who raped and killed tribals for brewing illicit liquor; he knew of Congress youth who had set fire to umpteen RTC buses the day Rajiv Gandhi was killed—somewhere near Madras, was it not? He knew of landlords who held daily 'darbars' in villages and awarded all manner of punishments. Not one of them, literally not one of them, and he had choked with tears whenever he had thought of this during the previous six days, had been arrested or tortured the savage way he had been, nor sent to jail under TADA. He felt like shouting in the court, maybe make a speech the way wronged persons do in films. But he could not get himself to do that. It was not fear that had deterred him, but the sheer absurdity of it, so preoccupied the court was with ridiculous bits of paper and pieces of gossip that there appeared to be no place there for the questions of justice and injustice that burnt his heart. So remote and indifferent

were the faces of the judge and the lawyers who waited in boredom for their cases to be called, that instead he had fallen to gossiping with the constables who had brought him to the court. One of the constables suddenly nudged him and pointed to a short, dark and determined looking young lawyer who had got up and was saying something to the judge, pointing in his direction. The constable introduced the lawyer as Prabhakar Reddy, the civil liberties lawyer, who handled all the cases of youth such as himself; he did those cases without charging any fees, the constable added in a tone of respect, but the second constable spoilt it by adding some nasty remark. He could not hear what the lawyer was saying but he saw the judge shake his head. After a while he was taken to jail. He spent, not six months as he had feared, but exactly six weeks and came out on bail. He knew he owed his liberty to the tenacity of the lawyer, and went to his house to thank him. He was a gruff man, more a peasant than a lawyer, and he spoke little. He just told him to attend the hearings regularly, asked a few questions about happenings in his village, and bade him goodbye. He had acquired in jail a lasting regard for the lawyer. He had come to know that there were hundreds of persons like himself, youth, peasants and labourers, whose cases the lawyer did. All the cases were under TADA, for trespassing onto a landlord's land, obstructing liquor business or other crimes. The lawyer did the cases with total dedication and never asked for payment of fees. He never bragged about it either, except to comment wryly, "your revolution is making a pauper of me."

Those six weeks in jail he had learnt a lot. He had discussed many things with the dozens of youth who had come there the same way he had. He had even read a little. He had listened to the speeches of the naxalite leaders who had been there for quite some time. More than anything else he had thought a lot. The onslaught had begun, and young men like him were being killed frequently in fake encounters. This was another thing he could not understand. He could not understand why it happened and why nobody spoke out against it. It was alright if the police and the dalams had shooiows. Both had arms and both were prepared to kill and get killed. But why did the police instead pick up unarmed youth and shoot them dead and concoct stories of encounters with armed dalams? It was understandable if it happened once or twice, but no, it happened with terrifying regularity. The papers had reported the statement of some civil liberties leader, that more than a hundred, a hundred and four if he remembered right, were killed in such faked encounters during last year. Why could not the chief minister tell the police not to do this, not to kill unarmed youth? Did he not know what was happening? He had seen the chief minister once at Warangal where he had laid a foun-

datation stone for something or the other and made a short speech. He had a smooth face and a toneless voice and had said a lot of pleasant things about giving jobs to youth and loans to farmers. Why did not someone tell him that nice young people who wanted to set things right in villages were being tortured and killed by the police? Perhaps it only required a word from someone and things would be set right. He felt very frustrated when he thought of this. In jail he had asked someone this question. They said that the chief minister and the police were together in this, and that the police did these things at the behest of the chief minister. He had not been satisfied with the answer. He had heard the chief minister's speech, had he not? There was no abuse, no use of filthy language such as the police use. The chief minister was surely a more reasonable man than the police. And so he had persisted with his queries. He had asked the lawyer when he saw him in the court at the next hearing. The lawyer did not reply but there was a friend by his side who had laughed and told him not to be stupid. When he had persisted with the question, that man became unaccountably bitter and told him a few things. Do you know, he had asked, that the chief minister's father was poorer than yours when he was in school? Do you know that today this fellow is worth hundreds of crores? Do you know what quantity of lying, cheating and thieving lies behind the prosperity? Do you know how this man became chief minister? Do you know that he got about 250 men, women and children murdered in Hyderabad in the name of Hindu-Muslim riots and used that as a pretext to remove the previous chief minister and himself grab that chair? Do you know.

And so the questions went on. No, he had not known all those things, and now he felt quite shocked. And depressed. The more he knew about things the more depressed he became. Questions of justice and injustice, which had seemed so simple and self-evident in the beginning, began to look very complicated and difficult. Some people had a lot of money and some people had very little. Some people had a lot of power and some people had little. This was unjust and it was necessary to set it tight. That was the first thing, the most important thing, to be done. That is what everyone ought to be doing. More so people who were educated, knowledgeable and influential. And yet most people were doing something else. What were the courts and judges doing, when hundreds of poor people were daily being brought before them for the crime of wanting land, a decent life and a dignified existence? They were doing nothing, just nothing, it was as if this monstrosity was not happening at all. And yet they were not idle. They were busy, constantly busy, with what he could not for his life make out. This is what frustrated him so terribly. Judges,

lawyers, chief ministers, policemen, professors, they were all intensely involved, tremendously busy with something other than what they all ought to be doing. And those like him who tried to do what ought to be done were beaten, tortured and killed by these very same people. The unfairness of it stung him.

Take this question of liquor, for instance. Everyone said it was evil. Everyone *knew* it was evil. Yet more and more liquor is sold by the government in the villages. His own village was a fine example. There had been no liquor shop during his childhood. The nearest one was at Gudeppad, six km away. Only addicts went all the way to drink. Then one year they heard that a big contractor from coastal Andhra had taken the bid for the district and that he had bid very high. Promptly a shop came up in his village. Five years later it became two and now there were three.

Nobody in the village liked it. Even the addicts cursed it when they were sober. The sarpanch, a Congressman, had made an emotional speech at the gram panchayat one day, calling his own government immoral for making a revenue of Rs 800 crore out of this evil habit. And so, when the local dalam leader Komurann called for a meeting in the village one day and said that his party had decided come what may to obstruct the excise auctions this time and hoped the people would co-operate with them, all the people had enthusiastically agreed. The women, especially, were most happy. He could understand, for he knew how they suffered at the hands of their husbands when they came home drunk. His own father was a good man, he never beat mother, but his elder brother took a regular toll of his sick wife, and so he witnessed the evil daily at home. So did most of his friends. They therefore had taken it upon themselves to see that not a single packet of liquor entered the village. They beat up the first two fellows who brought packets stealthily. They gave them such a thorough beating that nobody made an attempt for a long time thereafter.

Was this not a good thing? Everyone said it was, and yet how nastily the police had reacted! Four of his friends were arrested—he himself had escaped providentially—and beaten badly for obstructing the liquor business. They were booked under TADA, though what terrorism there could be in preventing people from drinking liquor he could not comprehend. This happened not only in his village, but in every village, in every district. And one day his mother told him a strange story. She had gone to Hasanparthy to visit a dying aunt of hers, and what did she see but a liquor sales point set up right at the gate of the police station, and armed constables selling the packets! There was a long queue of drunkards outside the police station, she said, they were buying liquor gladly from the very hands which in normal conditions any inebriated man

would fear to get close to. She had laughed and laughed narrating what she had seen, and then she had been very angry in turn. What kind of a government is this which uses policemen to sell the biggest cause of crime and violence, as she held liquor to be—? And why is it that none of the leaders who make nice speeches given the occasion had raised his voice against this ugly business? He too had laughed and he too had been angry. He just could not comprehend how this was possible.

As he thought over these things in jail, he had begun to realise that there was something terribly wrong with this world. Not only that there was injustice. That he had known. But what struck him now was that nobody wanted it removed. That was the crux of the thing, which he had not realised earlier. He had thought it axiomatic that if injustice was seen to exist, then everyone would wish to remove it. Now he was beginning to know better. They all talked about injustice, but they did not want it to be put an end to. And those who tried to put an end to it were attacked, jailed and killed.

In the process of realising this he had decided by the time he left jail that the fight was too much for him and he would give up. He did not discuss the matter with his friends in the village. Most of them had also been arrested, tortured and released one after the other on bail. One or two of them had silently decided to withdraw and had gone off to Bhiwandi or Surat to find work in the mills there. The others, he was afraid, would call him a coward. They had always been less innocent than he. They knew that they were bound to suffer, that it would take a lot of suffering to set the world right, and they were prepared for it. They expected others too to be prepared for it.

He therefore, said nothing to them but resolved to become quiet. But such resolutions are not easy to keep. Back in the village he found his old anger awakened again. Things once again took their elementary aspect: right and wrong, just and unjust. When a stooge of the liquor contractor was emboldened by the presence of the police to set up a sales outlet in the village, he had gone out with his friends and attacked him. They had burnt the liquor packets and kicked him till he begged them to spare his life. One thing thus led to another and he soon found himself deeply involved again. How could he not be? He could never forgive himself if he did not get involved and others did and suffered. That was not all. There was something else. He tried to give expression to it. He was an honest person, and for an honest person, he thought to himself, to do a thing and to think it, to live it in thought, art one and the same thing. He could not live the thought of inactivity in the face of injustice. He had always thought of the world in elemental terms, in terms of right and wrong, equity and inequity, good and

bad. To withdraw now would be to think in more compromising terms and that, to him, was hypocrisy.

The jeep came to a sudden stop and he was jerked back from his thoughts. He was not sure that he had been fully conscious at all. The pain had reached a throbbing intensity and he was feeling quite sick. The policemen pushed him out and he saw that he was at Matwad a police station, in the heart of Warangal. He felt more secure and went into the station following the policemen. Nobody spoke to him. They pushed him into a smelly but mercifully empty cell and locked it up. He sat down and leaned against the wall, glancing watchfully at the policemen outside. He badly wanted to lie down and stretch out but it would not do to let them think he was relaxing. He knew enough about policemen by now. Let them think you are having a pleasant moment and they will thrash you just to spoil it. So he sat back and allowed himself to look as sick as he felt.

Soon after his release from jail the police raids on villages intensified. The papers announced that the government had decided to 'crush the naxalite movement' mercilessly. The police officials of five states met and co-ordinated their plans. They asked the central government to lend some battalions of the Border Security Force, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Central Reserve Police Force. The battalions would soon come, the home minister announced at a press conference.

The first major raid on his village took place in November. He was asleep at that time, it was well before daylight, and was awakened by vague sounds that he could not place, for they were not the familiar sounds of day break. He had opened the door and looked out. He saw hundreds of policemen running up and down the street, swinging their sticks at any villager they saw. They would stop randomly at a house, kick open the door, go in and without a question or comment they would ransack the house and smash everything. Pots, pans, bowls, chairs, cots, clocks and transistor radios would all be smashed to bits with axes or boulders. Foodgrain would be thrown out and doused with kerosene. At the end they would selectively pull down the roofs of the houses of the most active youth.

He had not stood watching all this. He knew from the experience of other villages that this is what they always did. And he knew what would follow this destruction. They would gather all the villagers at the panchayat office, or perhaps under the banyan tree near the Hanuman temple, thrash every man, woman and child of them and separate the youth such as himself for special treatment, perhaps even an encounter as had happened, he had read in the papers, some time back in Nizamabad. So he had quietly slipped out and left the village by an obscure path, and had gone off to Wartngal.

There he learnt that all that he had guessed "had happened (excepting the encounter) and that five of his comrades had been thrashed to pulp and taken away to be implicated in yet another TADA case for setting liquor packets on fire. In addition, the police had forced the people to bring crowbars, axes and showels and destroy the sturdy martyrs memorial that he and his friends had laboured hard to build in the village. It was in memory of two naxalites of a village on the other side of the main road who had been killed in an encounter five years ago; there was nobody in that village now willing to host the burden of building the memorial and so he and his friends had offered to build it here instead, and raise money and material for it. The police had a particular disliking for these memorials which had sprouted in village after village during the last two years. Wherever they went on a raid they got the memorials destroyed by the very people who built them. He had come to know of the destruction in his village two days later from a newspaper report which quoted his father, his own courageous father, as saying that it was a very bad thing the police had forced the people to do, and that he did not mind saying so, come what may. That night he had allowed himself to indulge in the one act of vengeance of his life; he located a statue of Mahatma Gandhi near a road junction in the part of the town where he had been hiding, went up to it in the still of the night, and hit it with an axe, hit it again and again. It broke off partly and next morning the milk vendors going round the streets were surprised at the spectacle of the Mutilated Mahatma.

A sudden commotion in the police station brought him to consciousness. He realised that he had slid down and was lying full length on the floor. He got up and sat in the old position and looked out in curiosity. A lot of policemen had come in and they were talking in agitated but low tones. Some more lights had been lit. Policemen went in and out. The commotion lasted another ten minutes, and then suddenly all of them went out, leaving only the station's head constable. Most of the lights were again put out and it became half dark as before. The head constable leaned back against a table in the centre of the inspector's room and looked pointedly at the cell where he lay. It was a long and unblinking stare. He felt very disturbed. He tried to look away but his eyes were dragged back to meet the policeman's eyes. There was some undecipherable but definite meaning in those eyes, which made his stomach contract in a spasm of sickness. With an effort he turned his body away and faced the rear wall of the cell. After a while he heard the policeman go out, and relaxed a little.

He had gone back to the village two weeks after the raid. Things had quietened down but there was fear writ clearly on each face.

Some people even avoided talking to him. Others talked hastily, as if looking back over the shoulder to see who was watching, and took leave at the first chance. He had gone to the houses of the friends who had been arrested on the day of the raid; and how their mothers had wept. They wept and wept and told him to go to Warangal and talk to that civil liberties lawyer and get them out on bail. He promised he would, but they suddenly said no, you don't go, you leave this hell and go off to Hyderabad, to Bombay, some place where they will not get hold of you, they will kill you if they catch you, they missed you the last time. He had wept then and told them he would not go away without his friends. He would get them all released on bail, and then they would all go away, he had promised.

He had not immediately gone to Warangal, for that very day the naxalites killed an old Congressman, a good friend of the prime minister. The papers wrote that he had been a freedom fighter. Perhaps he had been. But they should also have written that he was a wicked man, a murderous man, that he was a notorious landgrabber. After all, when a naxalite was killed by the police the papers wrote about all the crimes he had committed. So many murders, so much arson and so many other crimes. Why should they not write similarly when a Congressman was killed? It was unfair, he had thought, that they should write only what was good and nothing that was bad about the old man.

He thought he would wait for a couple of days and then go and meet the lawyer, but that was not to be. Two days later the lawyer was murdered by the police. They had walked into his house saying they wanted to meet him, and had shot him in the head and chest as he came out to meet them. How shocked he had been when he read of it in the papers! The lawyer was such a nice man, so good and so dedicated. There was nothing evil that anyone could say about him and such a man too was killed by the police. He had felt desolate, as if he had lost a solid rock to lean on in times of trouble.

But things started moving fast afterwards. It was as if the lawyer's murder was a signal. The Border Security Force arrived in Warangal, and the killings started. Youth were picked up and killed everyday. The killings were spaced and timed with deliberation. And with clinical precision, for the superintendent of police had been a medical doctor before he joined the Indian Police Service, 'I give two weeks time for everyone to surrender', he would announce, 'and those who do not do so will face serious consequences'. And he would indicate the consequences by deliberately picking up and killing youth such as he from different corners of the district. Now it was the east, now the west, and now the north or south.

He was petrified with fear. It was easy to advise him, as many did, to either go to the superintendent of police and surrender

himself, or to leave the district and go away somewhere. It was easy to give the advice, but neither course was safe. What was the guarantee that his life would be spared if he surrendered himself? They were, after all, killing to create terror, and it did not matter to them whom they killed. Was it not reported that in quite a few instances, youth who had gone to the police to surrender had been cold-bloodedly done to death? He even recalled the details of one case. The boy had been very active helping the dalam in various ways, but after the SP's announcement he had decided to surrender and save his life. He went to the inspector and told him of his decision. The inspector, it was reported, had sneered and said do you think we are fools that you can offer to surrender yourself whenever things become hot and then go back to your old ways whenever you have the upper hand? No we are not, he had said, and that evening the youth was shot dead near a neighbouring village and a concocted story of an encounter was put out.

Going away from the district, on the other hand, was no less dangerous. The police would think—or at least profess to think—that he had gone underground, and his life would never be safe again. And so he had prevaricated, and decided he would wait till things got better, and take care in the meanwhile not to get caught. That was the foolish part of it. Caught he was, last evening. He had just come back from the fields, and was about to eat some food and leave the village, for it was part of his precaution not to sleep at home or anywhere in the village. As he sat down to his meal he heard a great commotion outside. He realised it was a police raid and quickly got ready to slip out and escape. But such was his misfortune that his was the first house the police came to. They beat on the door and his mother, shaking, opened it. There were some Border Security Force men who of course would not know who he was. But suddenly a face peered at him from over their shoulders and he recognised it as that of a local special branch head constable who knew him quite well. That man said something and those in front pulled him out. That was when he saw that there were a large number of heavily armed plainclothesmen in addition to the BSF men. They dragged him towards the jeep. Sick with apprehension he had foolishly resisted and been hit viciously with the butt of a gun. That was when he got the gash on his forehead. ...

He had slipped into a disturbed sleep, disturbed by pain and fear. He dreamt of the head constable's eyes that looked pointedly at him. The eyes terrified him. They had detached themselves from the man, his uniform and his insignia. They were alive and they dug into him like a drill. He could see nothing but the eyes. They gave a thousand hints, they bore a thousand expressions. There was commiseration, yes even pity, and there was triumph, triumph of two kinds.

the triumph of the victor but also the triumph of one who has knowledge of your fate that you do not have. Then there was the contempt that a sane man has for fools, and the anger that the guardian of Order has for those whom he regards as professional creators of disturbance. The eyes darted forward. They came closer and closer. There was a blaze in them that lit up the cell. They were very close upon him and he choked with terror, the closer they came the brighter it became...

He woke up suddenly, prodded by a policeman's stick. There were five of them now in the cell, all in plainclothes and carrying sten guns, and the cell was now brightly lit up as was the whole station. They glared down at him and one of them made a show of kicking him in the stomach. He cringed in anticipation and when the blow was not struck he quickly sat up and pulled himself back to rest against the rear wall of the cell. That was the farthest he could go from the policemen. He sat hugging his knees and looked up at them. They were evidently drunk, very drunk, but there was more than intoxication in their looks. There was rage, an animal rage, that he had never seen before in the eyes of any human being, even a policeman.

It dawned as usual, bright and cool, perhaps a trifle too cold considering that Shivratri was only a couple of weeks away. People were up and about as usual, and read the papers for news among other things of which villages the police had terrorised the previous day and how many they had killed in encounters. There was nothing in the papers about the previous night's happenings for they had taken place too late to catch the morning's papers. But rumours had spread fast in the town—that the naxalites had tried to landmine a police jeep on the outskirts of Warangal at about midnight, but the police escaped fortuitously. Enraged, they had come back into the town and gone in search of radicals. They had come to know, the rumours said, of one in the cell at Matwada brought from his village near Gudeppad during a routine raid the previous evening. They had taken him out, to the very spot where the mine had been placed, and asked him to run and shot him dead from behind. He had been pumped with sixteen bullets. The superintendent of police was preparing for a press conference where he would give the full details of the attempted mining of the police jeep, and the ensuing encounter with the naxalites which lasted two hours and a total of 300 rounds, leaving one unidentified naxalite dead and three unnamed policemen injured in unstated limbs and hospitalised in an unspecified condition of seriousness. The dead naxalite, the people would read in the next day's papers, had with him an AK-47 assault rifle and some documents that proved him to be a leading underground organiser, the deputy commander of the Komuranna dalam in fact.