

Economic Liberalism and Decline of Democracy

Case of Andhra Pradesh

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The recent enthusiasm for private enterprise has been accompanied by a sharp decline in all that we understand by democracy. This is most in evidence in states like Andhra Pradesh which have been witness to militant political struggles of the most oppressed classes of society. The events preceding and succeeding the ban on the People's War group in May this year reflect an order of brutality that beggars description.

CHANGE originates in the material basis of life but its arrival is signified in social consciousness. That is why all thorough-going materialists are more observant of consciousness than of matter. In Kosambi, for instance, archeology merely serves to verify culture

The sudden emergence of a new matrix of arguments—or rather the ascendance of a hitherto dormant and even diffident pattern of argumentation to the status of a new 'common sense'—signifies the fruition of some change in the netherworld of material life. Old experts discover new truths, new experts sprout at unexpected places, old truths are declared shibboleths, voices hitherto shy, diffident and perhaps even slightly ashamed become brazen, a surprise here, a shock there and a pinprick elsewhere add up before you can recover from any one of them to a complete and organically interlinked mosaic that is here after the Truth. You see the mosaic take shape before your eyes, the pieces fall into place, the lateral pattern matches the longitudinal design and the kinks and whorls add up to a new coherence, and before you know where you are, a new ideology, a newly defined common sense, is born. And yesterday's common sense is hereafter nonsense. That a whole society's dominant social consciousness—the Thith it officially (so to speak) believes in—is thus transformed in one *gestalt* sweep is proof of the historical materialist epistemological position that a society's consciousness is not a rootless and accidental collection of autonomous discourses that are beyond objective determination, historical necessity, factual veracity, philosophical correctness and moral approbation, but is a product of human history determined by its Being that is internally

rent by conflicting forces governed by a determinable logic, and is subject to growth and destruction, progress and retardation, on that basis; and that evolves its own standards of truth and falsity, morality and immorality, that are at one time in greater consonance and one time less with objective reality and objective progress in human freedom, dignity and equity. The currently fashionable discursive mode of discussion cannot explain why the transformation in social consciousness should at all take place, nor why it should take place right now, much less whether it is good for us or bad, true or false.

Today's new Truth is not just a rediscovery of the supposed virtues of capitalism, and democracy as defined by it, though that is how interested publicists are describing it. It is nothing so abstract and nothing so innocent as that. It is true (hat all over the world—and especially in trjrse parts of the world, including India, where people have never known much capitalism or much democracy of any kind—are-discovery of pristine *laissez-faire* virtues is taking place with an astonishing naivete. Perhaps, as an aside, the most astonished observers of this strange spectacle—if the truth be told—will turn out to be the corporate capitalists and their political representatives in the western countries.

But a rediscovery of old truths—or lies, for that matter—can never be a mere recapitulation. Much history has happened in between and the rediscovery is tainted with it. More importantly, even if what is rediscovered is an idea of the past, the impetus for the rediscovery comes from forces of the present, and that does much more than leave its mark on the effort; it shapes the mode of the rediscovery;

it sets the tone for it; and at the end it may indeed turn out that what has happened is not really the rediscovery of anything old but the fabrication—or the import—of something quite new, which has been clothed in old garments to give it a false legitimacy in default of a genuine legitimacy of its own. Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and persons of their ilk, without doubt, would be quite upset at some of the notions accompanying the rediscovery of the virtues of capitalism in the neighbourhood of Yeltsin's Russia. And they would certainly find it difficult to understand why, in India, it is accompanied by a total exercise of revision that includes such odd ideas like contempt for the secular view of social life; a grotesquely open glorification of religious fundamentalism; a singular lack of faith in the rationality of the individual of the human species; an attendant faith in a strong 'law and order' state; an anti-human indifference to the urge for social and justice; and an open admiration for crooks and political gangsters. Do we realise how much the very middle class that is rejoicing the victory of capitalism and democracy in the former Soviet Union admires Harshad Mehta and Mahant Avaidyanath; and how much it agrees with the International Monetary Fund's village moneylender's view of life and the lough' cop's view of the world seen through the eye of a sten gun?

Evidently, all this is very different from any Enlightenment paradigm, and therefore there is no point in talking of the Changes sweeping the world' (as editorialists these days say) as, firstly, a monochromic change independent of latitude and longitude; and, secondly, a well-deserved dawning of enthusiasm among hitherto backward people for the definitive values of the only civilised mode of life and death: the bourgeois mode. Such an understanding, in many cases, is wildly irrelevant.

SIGNALS OF CHANGED TIMES

The recent enthusiasm for private enterprise in India had been accompanied by a sharp decline in all that we understand by democracy, a point that enthusiasts of the 'changes sweeping the world' would perhaps (not) like to ponder. This change has penetrated quite deep into the country's social consciousness, and is apparent in recent political events. The July 1 police firing on workers at Bhilai is a major incident in the calendar of suppression for those committed to the cause of civil liber-

ties or workers rights, but to the rest of public opinion it is merely an overdone signal of the changed times: the country is truly sick of endless strikes and agitations that destroy the nation's wealth and upset the traffic, and workers had better be told so. The BJP government at Bhopal expresses no apology for the massacre, but its sister at Lucknow will brook no use of force whatsoever on the sadhus and saints gathered in their thousands at Ayodhya with the express purpose of violating a court injunction; and nobody finds this duplicity criminal. For the country, it is just one more step up the ladder for the BJP, and we are busy marking the score. The governments and two courts are bewildered for about two weeks by the irtransigence of the law-breaking and encroaching holymen, and yet the country that knows perfectly well that there would have been no bewilderment, and no appointment at the end of a committee of experts in structural engineering to determine whether the structure is what it is said to be or what it is alleged to be, but on the contrary very swift and destructive action if the gathering had been tribals encroaching upon forest land to put up huts to shelter them from the sun and rain, has nothing to say of this travesty of 'equality before the law' but on the other hand congratulates the prime minister for his sagacity in talking to the law-breaking holymen and getting them to postpone their crime by three months (or is it four?). The said sagacity is all set to become legendary, but in the meanwhile why does not P V Narasimha Rao talk also to the JKLF, the KCF, the NSCN, the LTTE, the PW group and all other insurgents, secessionists and what not, and find ways of postponing their law-breaking activities too by three months?

Down south, Jayalalitha (recently enthroned) has been freely bashing up journalists and all those she finds inconvenient following her success in getting the LTTE banned—in a country where they have never claimed to exist in the first place, give or take a couple of expatriate Jaffna Tamils, armed or unarmed, lurking around, and where their political goal has no meaning (as yet!). Her rule is offensive to both democratic sentiment and plain sense, but the country is not outraged. It is merely watching how, when (and whether) that lady will (by these means or other) move out of the shadow (if a dead man can be said to have a shadow) of her mentor the late MGR (and in due course grow a shadow of her own). In neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, the death dance Of the Janardhan Reddy government continues, with 193 young men and women being killed in 'encounters' in the first eight months of this year but this

gruesome tale evokes no response from otherwise normal people except the question; 'Is the Peoples War group finally finished?' as if it is a preliminary round of an Olympic event that is under discussion.

GOVERNMENT BY STEN GUN

The point of saying all this (one could say much more in this vein) is that it has to do with the second sacred cow, democracy. Destruction of all that we understand by democracy—not merely democratic rights and institutions but also values and culture—is one of the characteristics of the era we have entered: the era of economic liberalism, political gangsterism and government by the sten gun. The Janardhan Reddy government of AP provides the best (or worst) example. It is corrupt and immoral beyond all previous levels, brutal too beyond all previous records, and withal the most enthusiastic propagandist for the new economics (which is quite old) that we are being taught by P V Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh. A chief minister who got butchered about two to three hundred men, women and children in Hyderabad to get rid of the previous incumbent and get the throne for himself; who is accused of making the astronomical and unlikely figure of Rs 1 crore a day in bribes, accused not by the opposition but by his own partymen (with whom he will not share); about whom indeed every petty contractor or businessman you meet casually in a train or bus has a story of bribe-giving to tell, in astonishment at the ease of the immorality; who magnanimously grants permission exclusively to men of his faction of the ruling party and those formerly of the Telugu Desam party who defected at budget time to save the government of the very scholarly prime minister who looks as if he has never touched dirt in his life, to set up medical colleges by the dozen in the private sector and sell half the seats to the highest bidders, the better to make able doctors thereby; who defends at this huckstering in the name of encouraging private enterprise in an area where the public sector has no funds, that is to say in the name of the ruling economic philosophy; whose own cabinet is half full of men who maintain armed gangs or shelter those who do; who conduct their own private courts in the areas under their influence and render compulsory justice (or injustice); who carry (indeed many of them manufacture) illegal arms and explosives; who encourage their followers to break the law in defence of their interests; who grab other people's land and government land; a chief minister with a cabinet about half

full of such men takes a very virtuous step in defence of democracy by banning the People's War group because it carries arms illegally, holds its own courts, incites people to violate law, and organises the grabbing of private and public land. And yet the only comment one hears is the admiring commendation that he is 'a tough chief minister'; for we are all admiration these days for 'tough' chief ministers, 'tough' budget-makers, 'tough' policemen, and even 'tough' saints of the kind gathered at Ayodhya. We only dislike 'tough' dissenters whom we call extremists.

The 'changes sweeping the world', in this part of the world, include all this: Janardhan Reddy and Jayalalitha; Mahant Avaidyanath and much else besides. Nor is this an accident. The first four decades of our post-colonial existence can be described as a period of surrogate accumulation on behalf of the capitalists. To call it primitive accumulation would perhaps be more tempting but the implied analogy with the fledgeling but independent and innovative European bourgeoisie would beg too many questions. And yet even the notion of surrogate accumulation is incomplete: It is true that Jawaharlal Nehru and the public sector were used for capital formation on behalf of the capitalists for about four decades, and now the capitalists want to take it over, but that is not the whole story. Quite apart from the fact that Capital as a social category does not encompass the whole—or even a large part—of India's social life and therefore its story can never be the whole story, there is the unique political dimension of post-colonial expectations that gave the Indian state certain characteristics over and above its role as Capital's surrogate. But for those expectations, chapters 3 and 4 would never have been added to the Government of India Act 1935 to give India its present Constitution. The 1935 Act itself would have sufficed to govern India.

The liberal values imbibed in the struggle for liberation from the British who—wittingly and otherwise—taught us liberalism; the tremendous admiration for the phenomenon called Stalin (not much was known of his wans at that time and what was known was not believed); and the high expectations of equity raised by the social and economic struggles that accompanied the national liberation movement contributed to the creation of an agenda of democracy and equity. The Congress leaders themselves contributed to liberal expectations with their rhetoric of civil liberties and socialism; and the high admiration that Stalin's Soviet Union evoked even in the hearts of individuals who were critical as far back as that of the lack of political democracy, can be read in the

literature of that time. The countless small and major struggles for economic betterment and social justice that the colonial period witnessed have left an indelible track in people's consciousness and expectations, resulting in promises of nothing short of the moon on the morrow of the departure of the foreign rulers.

It is this agenda that now lies totally decimated. It is not just that for four decades after the writing of the Constitution the nation's rulers never ruled by the valuer proclaimed therein. More crucially, the political and economic system they have built—or allowed to get built—over these four decades is a monster completely incongruous with the ideal of 'justice, social, economic and political', and all that it entails. They have not only indulged in a day-to-day violation of the promise of democracy and equity but have, in the process, built and allowed to get built a system that is the opposite of that promise. And the recent shifts in economic and public policies merely mark a formal announcement that the play is over and hereafter there is going to be no further indulgence of¹ weak-hearted sentiments. The door that opens on imperialist capital will shut out the shibboleth of socialism; gangster politics will replace whatever electoral democracy we ever had; and the ubiquitous commando's sten gun will replace rule of law.

LINK TO ECONOMIC POLICIES

A broad-based path of economic development accompanied by a purposeful democratic transformation of social and economic relations would have paved the way for a mode of progress congruent with the ideals and aspirations of democracy and equity. What was actually attempted and structured was quite different. Economic development was based on the needs of a very small class in the urban and rural areas—but with the nether end sufficiently open to create stabilising hopes in the middle class—and social transformation was confined to what would spontaneously accompany even a limited spread of Capital, plus what was achieved by social and political struggles despite the very intolerant state. Thus we have a monstrous society encrusted with Capital at the top and decorated with formal democracy, a formation quite incompatible with genuine democratic and egalitarian ideals. And every time that, in the course of its growth, this monster has got caught in contradictions of its own, the solution resolving the crisis has entailed a further diminution of democracy and a further assault on equity. By the 80s the monster had reached a stage of a free-for-all scramble at the top for the nation's resources, a scramble that had to take place through politics and the bureaucracy

rather than the market, given the nature of India's economy. The scramble was accompanied by—and it implied—the demise of the Nehruite National consensus' about the public sector and planning, a consensus that was appropriate to the era when none of them had the brawn for the scramble. A way out of the systemic anarchy consequent to the demise of Nehruism, that is to say a new 'national consensus' appropriate to the era when the surrogate had become redundant, was avidly sought Editorials were daily written in the press, and learned papers were read in weekly seminars calling for a new consensus, and all eyes were on the lookout for a new messiah to replace the already mummified Nehru. They first sought him in the flamboyant Rajiv Gandhi, who appeared by his very background, character and outlook to be a different man from the corrupt and hidebound political elite; and then in V P Singh who appeared to beat a new path as a matter of conscious principle; and have finally decided they have found him in P V Narasimha Rao who is neither this nor that. That the messiah they are satisfied they have found is such a colourless and unoriginal old man who carries the 100-year-old Congress in each wrinkle of his face is proof of the continuity inherent in the new consensus. That the change was mediated by a severe balance of payments crisis and consequent IMF conditionalities is essentially an accident. It was due anyway, and was blocked only by lack of legitimising ideology. History obeys a law of inertial resistance in social consciousness to changes in the base. Some catastrophe, major or minor, is always required to break the inertia and inaugurate the change that has already reached a stage of fruition within. The dominant stream of social consciousness—the collectivity of the notions that society has hitherto consecrated as truth—needs to be ruptured before the change can be institutionalised, and that cannot happen without something of the order of impending bankruptcy of the government. It is this rupture that gives a sudden or *gestalt* character to the transformation in social consciousness, and enables a seemingly sudden uniformity of the new orthodoxy to erupt at all corners of society.

The advantage of change through rupture, based on the fear of a catastrophe, is that unreasonable and irrational arguments can be used with considerable effect, to put the blame for all that has gone wrong on the old orthodoxy. Many have, for instance, found it possible to argue seriously that Harshad Mehta happened because bank unions resisted computerisation; and Tavleen Singh, an otherwise intelligent and usually sensitive columnist of the *Indian Express*, manages to

believe that we failed miserably in Olympics because of the bad old habits practised in the name of socialism! She forgets that the bureaucratic control of arts, sports and culture is supposed to have been borrowed by us from the former Soviet Union and East Europe, and they thrived at Olympics as merrily before Gorbachev as after. Manmohan Singh can similarly get away with a lot of shoddy reasoning to explain policy changes, reasoning that would be unacceptably shoddy in less catastrophic times.

That apart, that is to say such temporary devices apart, a new ideology to legitimise the changes is under creation. Those who naively believe that private enterprise of any kind, at any time and any place goes best with democratic institutions (such as representative government, free press, fair administration and fair judiciary) and democratic values (such as freedom of conscience, secularism, right to life and liberty, equity) are at best incorrigibly innocent. On the contrary, in the peculiar context of the history of post-colonial countries such as India, such values, if only to a limited extent, were more compatible with the old orthodoxy or surrogate accumulation than the new orthodoxy of multinational-linked private enterprise for the few and by fewer, not because the bureaucracy is more democratic than big Capital—it was never even independent of it—but because the first phase of post-colonial development carried on its back the accumulated values of the national liberation movement and the other struggles that paralleled it. With the arrival of consecrated private enterprise we are also witnessing the demise of democratic and egalitarian dements of the dominant ideology. The calculated destruction of the latter through shrill propaganda was a necessary precondition to the consecration of the former. Its replacement is yet to be structured fully but some elements of it are already apparent: the accordance of a central place to religious values and identities, not excluding the acceptance of fundamentalism as possible politics; the legitimisation of elitism of caste and property; inculcation of a certain admiration for 'toughness'¹ (for what has been lamented most these four decades is the 'softness' of the Indian state) which would include authoritarian politics, ruthless policing, anti-welfare public policies and patriarchy in social and family relations; and the condonation of a *laissez-faire* attitude to public morality, which in simpler terms means accepting corruption as normal. The ideology has long been in the making. Individual events and the sanctioned, encouraged or tolerated responses to those events are good pointers to its substance. The anti-Mandal agitation, Chundur, Kumher, Ayodhya,

Bofors, Harshad Mehta, encounter killings, army flag marches, banning of political organisations; and at a less spectacular level, P V Narasimha Rao's election from Nandyal, the strange phenomenon called justice Ramaswamy, and the odiously corrupt Janardhan Reddy, are all phenomena worth studying from this point of view. They are not only symbols of the demise of what was accepted as the true and the moral till yesterday but also the base elements—the bricks, the timber and the tiles—of the new ideology. Such is the visage of the 'changes sweeping' this part of the world.

CORRUPTION OF POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS

Militant political movements—class or ethnic—may well believe that this is all to the good, that Manmohan Singh and the Mahants between them are making things easy for the success of their struggles. But those even among their supporters who take a broader view of social transformation can only worry at the creation of this gutter ideology. The dominant ideology of a society does not reside only in the ruling class. It penetrates and resides in (some times it even takes birth in) the people, and indeed that is its use and efficacy for the rulers. And corruption of popular consciousness is not something to be treated lightly. Values and institutions, once deformed, can become a habit in due course, and habits dull sensitivity. The deformity can become the norm and the rest mere illusion, or unrealistic 'idealism'. The cancer of deformity forms secondaries at places far from its origins, including the camp of its putative enemies. It is for this reason that the all-round destruction of popular culture, consciousness and life is so worrisome. And its automatic regeneration at any time of one's choice in the future cannot be presupposed. To take an admittedly extreme example, what kind of a Khalistan can any sensitive supporter of that ideal hope to see at the end of what is happening in Punjab today?

Perhaps it is necessary to emphasise this point a little more. The struggle for a better world is linked to the question of political power, and struggle for political power of the oppressed is a central political task. The suggestion current in certain streams of radicalism that the very notion of political power is authoritarian, 'masculine', and that the oppressed can seek social transformation without seeking political power to consolidate the transformation is a crippling notion. The state is not merely one form of oppression along with other forms. It is the legitimate upholder and protector of all existing social structures and therefore of all forms of oppression. It possesses the monopoly

of legislative and penal powers which it uses to this end. And can claim the monopoly of much else—including the definition and creation of legitimate ideas and knowledge—if (and to the extent that) the need arises. Genuine social transformation requires the 'smashing' of the state and the establishment of the political power of the oppressed until the transformation reaches a stage, if not of finality, then at least of a point of no return. The notions of dictatorship of the proletariat and the 'withering away of the state' mean this if they mean anything at all. And yet, while it is important to emphasise this in the face of debilitating reformism that turns up in more and more radical garments (and these days uses more and more impressively obscure language), a self-critical evaluation is in order, for political power has become much more than merely a strategic aid in completing and consolidating social transformation; it has tended to become the fount of social transformation, thereby robbing the transformation of its perpetual presence, and the dialectic of continuity and disjunction that defines its trajectory. Social transformation is made up of not only the destruction of all the inherited evils of the past; but also the preservation of the humane essence of the achievements of the past, while discarding the limiting and distorting (because contemporaneous) crust they wear, and redefining and reinstitutionalising the essence in a more progressive form. From this point of view the destruction of anything positive inherited from the past can only be distressing.

Democracy—understood as rights, values and institutions—is one such positive achievement of human history. What is bourgeois about it is the way it is limited and circumscribed; and the way it is conceptualised and institutionalised, by bourgeois society. This limitation—especially in third world countries dominated by comprador capital and feudal structures—can be very sharp even in the statutes and positively grotesque in practice, thus leading to a dismissal of the very notion of democracy as an illusion, a thin veil covering naked rule by the gun. But however natural, such a dismissal would be most unfortunate. Proletarian or people's democracy can only mean a quantitative extension and a reconceptualisation and reinstitutionalisation from the point of view of all the oppressed classes and groups of the rights won in previous democratic struggles which have hitherto been defined and institutionalised in bourgeois interest and often travestied in practice whenever that interest has been in a crisis. To dismiss democracy as something inherently illusory would be to lose something of lasting value that can-

not be recovered at will at such time as one pleases in the future.

PORTRAIT OF A HERO

The travesty, in the meanwhile, is in full evidence today, especially in states like Andhra Pradesh which are witness to militant political struggles of the most oppressed classes of society. The events preceding and succeeding the May 92 ban on the Peoples War group reflect an order of brutality (a brutality that affects not only the People's War group but all the CPI-ML groups, and indeed all people's movements) that beggars description. The government of this state and its police have never suffered from much moral diffidence—diffidence of the kind that paralysed P V Narasimha Rao and Kalyan Singh in Ayodhya recently—in choosing methods of suppressing the naxalite movement, but recent months have witnessed the removal of the last vestiges of scruples and inhibitions. The decision originated in the state government, obtained central approval signified by the lending of Border Security Force and fresh CRPF battalions (to supplement the CRPF and Indo-Tibet Border Police forces deployed earlier), and is being implemented by police officers of the 'tough cop' variety much admired by today's middle class. And the most systematically brutal of them, D T Naik, Superintendent of Police, Warangal, a tribal by birth, a doctor by education, and a policeman by temperament and choice, described by admiring journalists as a truly exceptional man, has been duly awarded what the press describes as the 'prestigious' president's medal this August 15 for meritorious services to the nation (such as, killing dozens of unarmed youth of poor rural families; pulling down hundreds of houses of the poor in the villages, and thrashing the inmates to pulp; encouraging landlords to re-occupy land grabbed by the poor, and offering the protection of his gun; opening liquor sales outlets at the gates of police stations in his district to protect the habit and the business of liquor from demise at the hands of the naxalites; and so on).

But perhaps he and his kind deserve that their services be made known to the nation in greater detail, and so here goes. The method of operation has a brutal simplicity characteristic of anti-insurgency operations anywhere in the world. Any evidence that the People's War group exhibits of its presence in an area is followed by a massive raid by a hundred to two hundred strong contingent of armed policemen, ranging all the way from uniformed BSF men to the local police who know who is what in the villages, and the murderous Special Task Force men, special in that they are specially trained

and motivated to maim and kill. The purpose of the raid is to brutalise the villagers so that they will never again allow the presence of the naxalites to be seen there. The raid consists of pulling out all the people from their houses, thrashing them to pulp, searching the houses one by one, smashing all household goods like pots, chairs, vessels, cots, pans and even the occasional radio with rifle butts and stones, spoiling the foodgrains with kerosene, and finally pulling down the roof and destroying the houses of known supporters and activists of the naxalites.

This is a daily occurrence in the affected districts. But when the People's War does more than merely make its presence felt, the retaliation is more swift and more lethal. On the evening of April 8 this year an armed squad of the People's War group blasted a liquor depot at Jangaon, a division headquarters town in Warangal district. The attack on the depot was part of its continued efforts to stop the selling and drinking of liquor. Given the importance of liquor, as a major source of income to the Congressmen, most of whom are liquor contractors; to the government, as an important source of revenue (second only to sales tax); and to the police and excise departments as a regular source of graft, the police have taken up a fight to protect the liquor business with a tenacity that eminently deserves a better cause. And so the blowing up of the liquor depot at Jangaon, a town with a heavy police presence, was taken as a slap in their face. They sought revenge, which usually takes the form of picking up some local sympathisers of the People's War group and killing them, but there were none left overground. All of them had either gone underground, migrated out of the district, or 'surrendered' to the police in one of those ostentatiously staged dramas that are shown regularly on TV to the edification of those who have not yet seen the light. No matter, the police decided to kill some former sympathisers who had surrendered last year. They went the same night to Pasaramadla, a nearby village, picked up Addala Rajender and Bejjera-boyina Chandramogili from their homes, and shot them dead in the grazing land behind their houses. The dead bodies were brought to Jangaon, placed at the blown up depot and a story was concocted and given out to the press that the police had heroically confronted the naxalites trying to blow up the liquor depot and an 'encounter' had ensued leaving two unidentified naxalites dead. The two youth, their families say, were supporters of the People's War group till last year, to the extent of providing shelter and food to the armed squad operating in that area. But last December, when it was made publicly

clear by the superintendent of police D T Naik that even such sympathisers would not be 'spared', that is to say they too would be killed in encounters, the two youth had gone to the DSP of Jangaon and had agreed to publicly denounce their past crimes and renounce past connections, such as they had had. When the naxalite squad had later come to the village they had told the squad leader not to come to their houses and the squad had gone away. It was such youth who were picked up and killed by the police and said to have died in the course of a heroic battle waged by them in the noble cause of alcohol.

Almost exactly a month later, near Pembarti in the same region, the People's War group attempted to blow up a government jeep, perhaps mistaking it for a police jeep. As it happened, it was a Revenue department's jeep, and as it also happened the attempt misfired and nobody died. The police nevertheless decided upon revenge. They again killed two youth from nearby villages. One of them was Parapalli Uppalaiah of Srinivasapuram, a border village of neighbouring Nalgonda district; and the other was Arnmanaboyina Anandam of Chaudharipalli near Jangaon. The two of them had already been in police custody for about two weeks. They were taken out of lock-up on May 16, killed near Pembarti and declared to be unidentified naxalites killed in an encounter. Of the two, Uppalaiah is said to have been arrested because he had a namesake in the village who was reported to the police as a sympathiser, and the police had only the bare name to go by; and Anandam was a student trying to get admission to a correspondence course of the Kakatiya University for his bachelor's degree, and had been reported to the police as a naxalite sympathiser because he had had a problem with another villager which the naxalites had helped to solve.

This is just a sample of the 'encounter' killings in this award winning policeman's regime in Warangal district. Similar tales can be told of Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Mahbubnagar districts but Warangal is one district where even intellectuals working by legal means for a democratic cause have not been spared. The daylight murder of APCLC'S Narra Prabhakar Reddy is well known. This year a very soft-spoken and gentle school teacher by name Gangadhar, one of the state-level secretaries of the AP Teachers Federation, one of the largest organisations of school teachers in the state, was arrested and tortured severely in illegal police custody on the accusation that he had links with the (now banned) People's War group.

Gangadhar, who has a doctorate in Telugu literature and contributes articles to leftist literary magazines, is alleged to have added his signature to a letter written by another teacher to the Warangal district leadership of the People's War group requesting them to intervene in the settlement of a long pending land dispute (it is a perversion of right and wrong that the unending pendency of disputes in courts is regarded as all right but a request to a banned organisation to help in resolving it quickly is wrong). He was taken into custody on July 3, locked up for two days, stripped down to his underwear and tortured. The sub-inspector of Ghanpur, where Gangadhar lives, is reported to have remarked to a colleague after expending his muscle power to the point of exhaustion of the frail teacher, that he had tortured many persons in his career but this was one man he had not really felt like torturing! After two days of such custody the teacher was taken to court. He reported to the court the treatment he had been subjected to and asked that he should be medically examined to substantiate his allegations. The court ordered accordingly, and Gangadhar was taken to hospital to be examined. It was late in the evening by the lime examination was over, and as jails do not take in prisoners after dark he was kept in the police lock-up at Hanamkonda that night, to be taken to prison the next day. That night, retribution visited him for having complained to the court of the torture he had been inflicted with. Two policemen entered the lockup, stripped him, beat him, and applied electric current to his temples, a favourite method of torture with the Indian police in these modern days.

This was the last record-worthy act before the superintendent of police of the district was awarded president's medal on independence day for meritorious services to the nation.

Such are today's heroes of the nation, heroes of P V Narasimha Rao's new India. Not merely in the police, but in politics, in finance, in industry, in the army and in the fields of knowledge and culture. This implies not merely a greater suppression of people and people's struggles. It implies also the decimation of the positive values brought into being by past people's struggles. And that is a loss as serious as the more explicit suppression of dissenting political movements.

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