

Tribals' exploitation root of A.P. Naxalism

By C. LOKESWARA RAO

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IT is not just that Naxalites abducted seven IAS officers at Gurtedu in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh in 1987 and a Congress MLA, an IAS officer and others at Boodaralla in Visakhapatnam district in 1993. In Manyam, as the forest tract of northern coastal Andhra is known, there have been uprisings for 200 years.

There was the Golconda revolt in 1837. There was the Rampa Fituri rebellion in 1878 which resulted in skirmishes for some decades. There was the Langarayi rebellion in 1916-17 and Alluri Sitaramaraju, a great patriot who organised tribals of Manyam, fought the British in 1920-24.

Raju, who dropped out of college to lead the tribals, is the patron-saint of the Naxalites. A hero who was praised by Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India*. In 1925, Raju had a place unequalled in the consciousness of Andhras. Sitaramaraju, to date, figures in children's fancy dress contests and mono-acting shows by students.

In the 1950s, Mr S. M. S. Naidu, a film-maker from the South, made films in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi simultaneously, with MGR, NTR and Dilip Kumar playing the Rob-inhood hero. The Telugu version alone turned out to be a big hit. These films had a ballad on Alluri Sitaramaraju narrated by Nasser, a great exponent of the folk form of *Burrakatha* (folk tale).

Places associated with Sitaramaraju have been in the news in connection with Naxalite violence. Raju was killed at Koyyuru. The spot, named Rajendrapalem after Sitaramaraju, is on the road from Koyyuru to Boodaralla.

The recent abduction of Mr Balaraju, Congress MLA, took place near Boodaralla. Negotiations over the hostages took place at Koyyuru and nearby forests. Kranti Ranadev, the prisoner freed in exchange for the MLA, was handed over to the People's War Group in the forests at Koyyuru.

Sitaramaraju's samadhi is at

Krishnadevipeta. At one stage, during the recent abduction crisis, the PWG set free some hostages. The Naxalites have killed tribals like Allapuswamy at Chintakoppu village, Marri Nageswara Rao at Kodisingi and Bodinayak Nilakantha at Kottapakala.

Also, a police constable was killed in a landmine blast by Naxals at Sapparla. Vantal Lakshmanrao, a tribal of Kodisingi, was killed by the police. These villages are in the Gudem Kotha Veedhi Mandal. Sitaramaraju was active in the area.

A police officer was killed in Langarayi where Sitaramaraju's men freed Darabandala Chandraiah, who had been imprisoned after the Langarayi revolt. Meka Suribabu, a CPI leader, was killed by the PWG in Golconda, a scene of revolt in 1837.

The names Gurtedu, Boodaralla, Koyyuru, Golconda and Narsipatnam, from where the first message about the recent abductions was conveyed to government officers at Narsipatnam, all figure on a map sent to agents, now called collectors, of East Godavari, Vizianagaram and Gnjam districts with an order of the governor dated February 11, 1929, by Mr H. R. Patel, secretary to government. The district magistrate court in Kakinada, headquarters of East Godavari, is till termed the court of the agent to the government.

The exploitation of tribals by traders and other plainmen, introduction of money economy which led to the alienation of land, and implementation of excise and forest policies have provided grounds for discontent among tribals and revolts/intervention on their behalf over the last two centuries. The Madras Forest Act of 1882 curtailed traditional rights to collect forest produce, graze cattle and do *podu* shifting cultivation in forests.

While the implementation of government regulations hurting the interests of tribals, like denying the right to collect forest produce, was effective, other regulations passed in favour of tribals were not implemented vigorously. The Madras agency debt and land transfer regu-

lation of 1917 prohibited the alienation of land of a hill tribe to a non-hill tribe.

Marrying tribal women became a ruse. Land was kept in the woman's name but effective control vested with the non-tribal who married her.

The juxtaposition of Naxal violence and callous neglect and exploitation of tribals is striking. Nagulakonda Dalam, an armed squad of the PWG named for a hill in this area, had carried out the recent abduction to achieve the exchange of a top prisoner, Kranti Ranadev.

Voluntary organisations in these parts are fighting over two major issues concerning tribals. One is the alienation of tribal land through the ruse of living with tribal women by taking advantage of the fact that tribal women do not need elaborate marriage rituals and the security offered by rules and customs. The other is the neglect of health care even when people die like fleas.

Nagulakonda Dalam had killed two police constables, two polling officials and a woman voter at Sarugudu village in the Natavaram Mandal of Visakhapatnam district in June, 1991. The government rushed forces in large numbers to conduct a repoll the next day.

The government's response to deaths due to fever, vomiting and motions in June-November 1992 in the very same Sarugudu area marks a contrast. A public health centre (PHC) at Ramannapalem village, which can be reached with great difficulty and stunt-driving by jeep along ruts made by bullock-carts along hill slopes, caters to 14 villages/hamlets where 36 people, including 15 small children, died between May 26 and November 7.

Seven of these deaths took place in Sarugudu, which is near Ramannapalem, and 68 deaths occurred in Sundarakota, an inaccessible village on the hills beyond Sarugudu.

The district collector had to walk 100 minutes from Sarugudu to Sundarakota, where 15 children died between June 2 and September 14. The collector visited the village on November 7.

Tribals take death philosophically. Peasants in Ramannapalem use the expression, "jaarukunnaru" (slipped away). Even so, Gamu Balaiah of Ramannapalem, who lost his 11-year-old daughter, Veerayamma, on July 16, said, "it doesn't matter when old people slip away but we are pained when children slip off."

Balaiah recalls that he and his daughter both had fever. A doctor and a nurse were present at the PHC but they had no medicines. Stocks had run out and had not been replenished. Balaiah and his daughter walked to another village through hilly passes to reach a doctor and buy medicines. They received injections, too. They walked back to Ramannapalem. The girl died the next day.

Soon afterwards, Balaiah's teenaged son had high fever. The PHC had still not received replenishments. He took the boy for a ten-km trek through hills and back again. The son survived.

Samatha, a voluntary organisation in Tuni down, made a repeated representations and organised a rally at Naatavaram on October 17. The government's response was tepid. There were 16 deaths in June-July and when the ITDA office at Paderu was informed on July 21, a medical team went to Sarugudu on July 30. They gave medicines only to the people they could contact at the Sarugudu shandy on that day.

Similarly, another medical team gave medicines to people at Sarugudu shandy on September 25. It was only after the collector's visit on November 7 that medical personnel visited villages covered by the Ramannapalem PHC and gave

medicines, recalls Mr P. Ravi of Samatha. The toll had mounted to 36 by then.

Samatha and Sakthi, based in Rampachodavaram, are filing a writ in high court regarding callous neglect of health in tribal areas. Sakthi has compiled material about doctors' postings in tribal areas misused as launching pads for admission to post-graduate courses.

Sakthi has been organising a campaign over the alienation of tribal land and abandoned tribal women. Over 100 cases have been filed by abandoned women in places like Maredumilli, Rampachodavaram and Addateegala, notes Mrs P. Sarada Sivaramakrishna of Sakthi.

A few people like the Desagiri Fakiru family in Singampalli village, near Zaddangi, have regained land from non-tribal land owners. But abandoned women have few gains to show. The main problem is that legal profession tends to invoke Hindu marriage provisions, which should not apply to tribals, and even use derogatory terms like concubine for tribal complainants.

It is true that the Naxalite movement flourishes in Manyam forests. Particularly after the birth of the People's War Group in 1980, the movement took a violent turn. Policemen have been attacked and killed. There have been abductions galore and landmine ambushes. The cadres are armed with superior weapons like AK-47.