1946-1951

TELANGANA PEOPLE'S ARMED STRUGGLE

P. SUNDARAYYA

Navatelangana Publishing House
Publication No : 1399

Published by
NavaTelangana Publishing House

First Edition : August, 2016

For Copies
NavaTelangana Publishing House
M.H. Bhavan, Plot No. 21/1, Azamabad,
Near RTC Kalyana Mantapam, Hyderabad-500 020.
Ph: 040-27660013, 040-27635136

Branches :
NavaTelangana Book House
Hyderabad - Chikkadapalli ; Baghlingampalli (SVK) ; ECIL ;
Nalgonda, Hanmakonda, Khammam, Karimnagar and Nizamabad

Prajasakti :
Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Thirupathi, Guntur, Ongole and Nellore

Price : ₹ 100/-

Printed at
NavaTelangana Printers Private Limited ; Hyderabad
Publisher’s Note ...................................................... 4

Foreword
M. Basavapunnaiah .................................................. 5

Notes on the Book ................................................... 7

Part One
Historical Setting ..................................................... 8

Part Two
First Phase and Its Lessons ................................... 33

Part Three
Pitted Against the Indian Army ............................ 67

Part Four
Background to A Momentous Decision ............... 99

Notes and References ........................................... 141
PUBLISHER’S NOTE

Comrade P. Sundarayya’s *Telangana People’s Struggle and Its Lessons* was published by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1972; the same year an abridged version was published by *Social Scientist*, monthly, in its No.s 7-10.

The present book is based on the abridged version of Comrade P. Sundarayya’s work as it appeared in *Social Scientist*, with a foreword by M. Basavapunnaiah first published by National Book Centre, New Delhi in 1985. This is the Second Edition published by NavaTelangana Publishing House, Hyderabad.
FOREWORD

COMRADE P. SUNDARAYYA, a member of the Central Committee and one of the prominent members of the Secretariat of Visalaandhra State Committee of the then united Communist Party of India in 1948-51, had compiled the history of the heroic Telangana peasant partisan war during the period from June 1946 to October 1951.

He painstakingly collected all the relevant facts and figures and used them in his book which covers nearly 600 pages. Very little can be added to those facts which can substantially alter the character of the book. The first eight pages of the book, “A Few Words About This Book” and the “Introduction”, sum up most of the achievements and lessons of this historic peasant armed uprising, first against the feudal Prince of Hyderabad and, following it, against the armed intervention of the Indian army and police which lasted from September 13, 1948 to October 1951.

Comrade Sundarayya was not simply one of the seven ‘Secretariat members of the Visalaandhra State Committee who were politically leading this epic partisan struggle, he was for months together in the partisan areas living amidst the partisan fighters. He also took a leading part in shaping the political - tactical line of the struggle, and in conducting the five year long peasant armed struggle. This had specially endeared him to all the active participants in the struggle.

The historic Telangana peasant revolt, more than anything else, pushed the issue of agrarian revolution to the forefront. The so-called Bhoodan movement of the late Vinoba Bhave and the several agrarian legislations pushed through several State legislatures all over India, were a sort of attempt to counter the surging flames of the agrarian revolt.
This epic Telangana struggle also dealt the death blow to the existence of hundreds of princely States all over India and paved the way for the linguistic reorganisation of States in the Indian Union. More than all this, this historic Telangana struggle brought the Indian Communist movement on to the political stage and map of India as a formidable force with which the bourgeois landlord ruling classes had to reckon.

The bourgeois-landlord Government which ruthlessly suppressed the Telangana peasant revolt, thought that it had succeeded in crushing and decimating the Communist movement in India. However, as history showed, the Communist Party and its allies emerged as the single biggest Opposition group in the Indian Parliament in the first General Elections of March 1952. Since then the ruling classes have been giving top priority to suppress and disrupt the Indian Communist movement by every means at their disposal. But the Communists, with the backing of the democratic and progressiveminded people of India, have successfully fought back, and established themselves as the leading left force in the country, and as the real hope of the people for a genuine alternative to the bourgeois - landlord class rule in the country.

The late Comrade Sundarayya who passed away on May 19, 1985, has left an indelible inprint on the course of the Telangana struggle and its overall impact on the politics of the nation. Let his name remain eternal in the annals of India’s national liberation struggle, and the struggle for the cause of Communism. Let us also remember the thousands of heroic comrades who laid down their lives in the course of the struggle. Their sacrifice has not been in vain; they will always be remembered by our people.

I share due pride, along with the rest of the leaders of the great Telangana movement, to have been with Comrade Sundarayya who gave his utmost to this memorable struggle.

M. BASAVAPUNNAIAH
New Delhi
July 30, 1985
CONSIDERING it my elementary duty in which I failed during the last two decades at least to outline the rich and varied revolutionary experiences and lessons of this glorious struggle, I have tried to narrate the story of the Telangana struggle, basing myself mainly on the factual material contained in reports that were received from different area organisers of the struggle at that time; and on the personal experiences of many of those leading comrades who were and even now are in the thick of the movement. Our effort has been to give the reader a comprehensive narration of the development of this struggle, and all the relevant details available to us, in order to point out the most important political lessons that emerge from the experience of this movement.

We are conscious that many other details of actions of the people and of guerrillas and cadre which should have found a place in this book are not included. This is due to the lack of those details with us; due to the failure of all the participants in that struggle to record their experiences, their knowledge of people’s reactions and their own feeling during the period or later. Whenever these accounts become available, it will not be difficult to include them and have a fuller and more comprehensive history of the Telangana People’s Struggle.

In this narrative, there may be factual discrepancies with regard to minor details; these too can be corrected, if the participants or readers point them out.

Certain colleagues have pointed out to us that the book does not bring out fully the rich experience and the heroism of the movement. We are acutely conscious of this weakness; but it can be
remedied only if the participants themselves write out or recount their experiences, even after this lapse of time.

Regarding accuracy on one point: the exact number of those Killed and wounded and the number of participants in many an encounter cannot be verified now after the passage of so much time, when the Government records are not yet available, and the truth is sought to be suppressed by the authorities. We have not tried to edit the narration of the events, as given by some of the chroniclers, or as recorded in the available reports from the lower units to higher centres. It was difficult even at that time of actual occurrence, let alone now, to verify the exact details. We have based ourselves on the chroniclers’ narration and on the recorded reports in the files.

In giving brief sketches of martyrs, we have tried to give whatever was available in the records and from accounts comrades have given us. There are omissions of many key cadre, squad members, whose deeds and activities need special narration. We appeal to all those old participants to compile their reminiscences of all these martyrs, so that future generation can be educated by their example.

It is generally estimated that about 4000 communists and peasant militants were killed by police, military and landlord terror during 1946-51, excluding thousands of *koya* people who died of disease in concentration camps. Some investigations put the figure nearer 6000. We do not have the names of all those killed; nor even the names of the villages from where they were picked up and shot dead. We hope comrades and people will collect, even now, the names and number of those killed, village after village.

P. SUNDARAYYA
PART ONE
HISTORICAL SETTING

It is now 20 years since the Telangana peasants’ armed struggle was withdrawn on October 21, 1951. There is no authentic narration, even in outline, of how this struggle developed in that Nizam governed feudal State of Hyderabad into a peasants’ and people’s armed revolt; of the intervention by the Indian Army on September 13, 1948; and of the heroic armed resistance put up by the peasant masses for three years to defend the lands they gained earlier from seizure by the land lords backed by the armed forces of the Nehru Government. Avowed enemies and hostile critics of this great movement have produced tons of literature denouncing the struggle as communist ‘violence, banditry and anarchy’.

The Right Communists are vociferous in depicting it, particularly the stage of the partisan resistance during the years 1949-51, as sectarian, dogmatic and individual terrorism in the main. The Naxalite leaders are busy carrying on the smear campaign that the leadership of the Telangana struggle betrayed it in calling it off in October 1951.

To present, in brief, an overall balance sheet of this heroic peasant uprising: it exacted tremendous sacrifices from the fighting peasantry of Telangana and the Visalandhra state unit of the Communist Party which led this popular peasant uprising. As many as 4000 communists and peasant militants were killed; more than 10,000 communist cadres and people’s fighters were thrown into detention camps and jails for a period of 3-4 years; no fewer than 50,000 people were dragged into police and military camps from time to time, there
to be beaten, tortured and terrorised for weeks and months together. Several lakhs of people in thousands of villages were subjected to police and military raids and to cruel lathi charges; the people in the course of these military and police raids lost property worth millions of rupees, which were either looted or destroyed; thousands of women were molested and had to undergo all sorts of humiliations and indignities. In a word, the entire region was subjected to a brutal police and military terror for full five years, initially by the Nizam and his Razakar armed hordes, and subsequently by the combined armed forces of the Union Government and the State Government of Hyderabad. After the police action, a 50,000-strong force of armed personnel of different categories was deployed to violently suppress the movement and restore the shattered landlord rule. According to some unofficial estimates, the Government of India spent as much money and resources in Hyderabad then, as it spent in its war with Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir during the years 1947-48.

Of course, the picture is not complete without its second side, an impressive record of achievements and gains to the credit of the peasant uprising. During the course of the struggle, the peasantry in about 3000 villages, covering roughly a population of 3 million in an area of about 16,000 square miles (mostly in the three districts of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam) had succeeded in setting up gram raj on the basis of fighting village panchayats. In these villages, the hated landlords—the pillars of the Nizam’s autocracy in the rural areas were driven away from their fortress like houses (gadis) and their lands were seized by the peasantry. One million acres of land were redistributed among the peasantry under the guidance of the people’s committees. All evictions were stopped and the forced labour service was abolished. The plunderous and exorbitant rates of usury were either drastically cut down, or forbidden altogether. The daily wages of agricultural labourers were increased and a minimum wage was enforced. The oppressive forest officialdom was forced to abandon the entire forest belt, and the tribal people and the people living in the adjoining areas of these forests were able to enjoy the fruits of their labour.
For a period of 12 to 18 months, the entire administration in these areas was conducted by the village peasant committees. During the course of this struggle against the Nizam’s autocracy, the people could organise and build a powerful militia comprising 10,000 village squad members and about 2000 regular guerrilla squads, in defence of the peasantry against the armed attacks of the Razakars and the Nizam’s police. Lakhs of peasants, for the first time in their lives, could have two regular meals a day. In short, this historic peasant rebellion shook the medieval autocratic regime of the Asafjahi dynasty to its roots, delivering deathblows against it.

To this heroic peasant resistance movement goes the credit of pushing the question of the agrarian revolution into the forefront, compelling the unwilling hands of the Congress leaders to embark upon various agrarian reforms, however halting, half-hearted and pitiful they were. It was during the course of this struggle that the bhoodan Utopia was conceived by Vinoba Bhave, the sarvodaya leader, who was sent thereby the Congress leaders for the ‘pacification’ campaign and for anti-communist propaganda among the peasantry. It was in the course of this bitter and prolonged struggle that the people came to grasp the truth that the land problem can never be really resolved by the honeyed phrases and pompous promises of the bourgeois-landlord rulers; that, on the contrary, only a powerful, organised, militant mass struggle can do this.

It must not also be forgotten that not a small share of credit goes to the Telangana struggle for forcing the pace of states’ reorganisation on a linguistic basis, enabling the several disunited and dismembered nationalities to resolve their long cherished democratic demand for separate statehood. The powerful blows that this struggle delivered to the princely regime of Hyderabad inspired the struggle which won the Andhra state after the martyrdom of Potti Sreeramulu in 1952; this, in turn, paved the way for the formation of linguistic states throughout India in 1956, forcing the Congress leadership to demolish the unprincipled and arbitrary division of the country made by the former British rulers.
In this connection, it is very necessary to realise that the Communist Party, which had the proud role of leading this historic Telangana revolt, had to bear the brunt of the repression with tremendous sacrifices. The Communist Party, which was at the head of the Vayalar Punnappra struggle in Kerala, which was at the head of the post war peasant struggles and the working class struggle in Bengal, emerged as a result on the national political scene as a widely recognised and effective political force, to be seriously reckoned with. From a small force of militant working class trends that it used to be till then in shaping the destinies of India’s multi millions, the Communist Party earned the prestige and honour of emerging as the single biggest opposition group in the first Parliament, following the 1952 general election.

The single biggest contribution made by the Telangana peasant revolt to the communist movement in India is that this struggle brought to the forefront of the Indian communist movement almost all the theoretical and ideological questions concerning the strategy and tactics of the Indian people’s democratic revolution, for correct and scientific answers and realistic and practical solutions. A series of issues, such as the role of the peasantry in the people’s democratic revolution; the place and significance of partisan resistance and rural revolutionary bases; the question of concretely analysing the classification among the peasantry; and the role played in the revolution by the different strata of the peasantry; the perspective for the Indian revolution; the specific place and role of the working class and urban centres in our revolution; the precise meaning and import of the concept of working class hegemony and the part played by the Communist Party in realising it in an underdeveloped and backward country like ours, where the modern working class does not exceed one per cent of the population—these were thrown up for serious inner party debate and decision. Life and experience, after a prolonged inner party struggle, enabled the Party to arrive at a fairly correct political line, with satisfactory answers to most of the problems posed.
During the course of the struggle, particularly during the phase of its last two years, the Communist Party from top to bottom was sharply divided into two hostile camps, one defending the struggle and its achievements, the other denouncing and decrying it as terrorism and so on. Those who opposed this struggle had even come out openly in the press, providing grist to the mill of the enemies in maligning the struggle and the Communist Party that was leading it. This sharp political-ideological split, though enveloping the entire Party in the country, was particularly sharp and acute in the Party’s Visalandhra unit which was directly and immediately involved in this valiant peasant uprising. History has demonstrated that the inner party unity achieved following the withdrawal of the Telangana armed resistance in October 1951 was only formal, superficial and temporary, and that the division actually got crystallised into two distinct and hostile political trends. It was certainly no accident that in the Communist Party split that came about in 1962-63, the division in the state Party unit of Visalandhra remained, more or less, of the same character and with the same composition, as it was during the 1950-51 inner party strife.

With the exception of a handful of individual communist leaders and cadres, who might have changed their loyalties and political convictions, the bulk that stood opposed to the Telangana struggle, on one count or the other, opted out to the side of the reformist and revisionist Right Communist Party; while the overwhelming majority that defended the struggle to the last, rallied firmly behind the Communist Party of India (Marxist). No serious student of the Indian communist movement can succeed in getting to the root cause and reason that inevitably paved the way for the split in 1962-63 if he were to bypass the struggle of Telangana and the various inner party controversies that broke around the issue of conducting this valiant peasant resistance movement.
I

HYDERABAD STATE:
ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Hyderabad State, which was formed by the Nizam after the death of the last Mughal Emperor, was reduced to a subsidiary feudatory state covering an area of about 83,000 square miles under the British, after the cession of Berar of the Maharashtra area and the costal and ceded districts of the Andhra area to the British. The Hyderabad State consisted of three linguistic areas; the eight Telugu speaking districts with Hyderabad city, the capital of the State, constituting the Telangana area; the five Marathi-speaking districts in the north-west of the State constituting the Marathwada region; and the three Kannada-speaking districts in the south-western part.

The Telangana region occupied 50 percent of the area; as against 28 percent occupied by the Marathwada region; and the remaining 22 percent by the Kannada region. The Telugu speaking population in 1951 was 9,000,000 (50 per cent); the Marathi-speaking population about 4,000,000 (25 percent); the Kannada-speaking population 2,000,000 (11 percent); and the Urdu-speaking population 2,00,000 (12 percent). Since the Nizam was a Muslim, Urdu was made the language of the courts and the administration at all levels, and also medium of instruction from the primary stage. The culture and language of the overwhelming majority of the people living in Hyderabad State was sought to be suppressed by the rulers, and the natural desire for education and cultural development, for protection and development of their mother tongue got inevitably linked up with the struggle against the Nizam’s rule.

The fact that the Nizam of Hyderabad, a vassal of the British imperialists, was a Muslim and the vast majority of the people of
End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @

* * *