

GOVERNANCE AND REBELLIONS IN TRIBAL AREAS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

40% of the Godavari basin is populated by tribals. The Rampa rebellion (1880) – the Bhumakal in Bastar (1910) – the fiturities in Rampa and Gudem(1798 - 1924), the martyrdom of Komaram Bheem (1942) – the Telangana armed struggle (1948) – the killing of tribals in police firing in Indravelli (1982) – the tribal land right movement in West Godavari and Khammam districts (1995...) are some land marks in the struggles of tribals in the Godavari valley.

After suppressing the Rampa rebellion, the British government brought the tribal areas of Godavari district also into scheduled areas. A Sub-Collector was appointed in Bhadrachalam covering the Bhadrachalam and Polavaram taluks. He has been designated as assistant agent whereas the district Collector is agent to the government. Laws protecting tribal lands were came into force in 1917, agency rules were framed in 1924 to deal with the civil and criminal disputes. With these enactments and arrangements, the governance in scheduled areas gained special character. When tribal in Bastar rose in revolt against forest laws, the officer on special duty in 1910, proposed to introduce the knowledge of these laws and rules in the schools to enable the tribals to complain about the violation.

“(The British) wanted one person in every household to read and write so that they could explain rules to the rest. – Debrett, Confidential no.4417. (Officer of Special Duty, Bastar state 1910)

(The British) were willing to accept the complaints against the subordinate officials but not against the rules themselves..... (– Standen, Confidential No.60). [B.P.Standen, Chief Sec. To CC CP 1910].”

- Nandini Sundar, Subalterns and Sovereigns, An anthropological History of Bastar, 1854 – 1996, Page No. 148 & 149; Oxford University Press 1997

Till date, this proposal did not materialize. The colonization of tribal areas by non-tribals intensified, leading to frequent disturbances. Now, 50 % of the tribal area is under the occupancy of non-tribals.

In 1942, after the martyrdom of Komaram Bheem, the Gond leader, Hyderabad state notified the tribal areas, rules were framed in 1949. The anthropologist, Prof. Haimendorf was the architect of these measures.

In 1959, APSALTR (Andhra Pradesh state Scheduled Area Land Transfer Regulation) was promulgated all over the scheduled area of A.P. According to Haimendorf, some of the best provisions and practices in the notified are regulation of Hyderabad state were repealed. Moreover, the government started issuing orders exempting certain category of non tribals from the LTR. The plight of tribals lead to protests in Indravelli of Adilabad district, where several tribals were killed in police firing.

In 1984, the government curved Utnoor (Adilabad district), Rampachodavaram (East Godavari district) revenue divisions in the tribal areas. The ITDAs which used to operate from district head quarters were shifted to agency areas. A Joint Collector rank Project Officer, a Sub - Collector etc. and the other officers were appointed in the agency head quarters in each district. The ITDAs were emerging

as mini Collectorate. Agency land survey was taken up to update the land records and demarcate the revenue, forest boundaries. The work done in this regard in Utnoor revenue division was hailed as a model. But, the agency survey work was abandoned in 1992 leaving the rights of tribals both in forest and land unsettled.

The government reserved all the posts to be recruited at district level in agency area for tribals. 100% of the sales persons of DR depots, teachers, village secretaries, 50 % of the posts in other departments i.e. forest, police, excise etc. are reserved for tribals. Educated tribals were encouraged to open schools as volunteer providing a nominal honorarium. For every 10 kms, we can find a school with boarding facility. But the employment opportunities for tribals saturated by 90s.

THE YOUTH: A RESOURCE TURNED INTO A PROBLEM

The youth here are almost universally filled with confusion and apprehension. The exceptionally lucky amongst them reach the matriculation level, and it takes four times as much luck for them to get through (the pass results at the matriculation level is less than 25%). All of this is the improbable result of a highly visible educational effort with scholarships and free hostel facilities!

A large majority of those that pass the school leaving examination are compelled to go through a very trying period of 'watching and waiting' for some salaried job somewhere. Only 5-10% make it while the others continue to "watch and wait" and eventually their hopes and aspirations merely dry up, leaving them angry, bitter and frustrated.

It has been the youth of this kind that has stood behind the 'Annalu's (CP-ML extremists), and perhaps for very valid reasons.

How can a society afford to let the most potent and promising section sink into the oblivion of unemployment and marginalization – and make permanent villains out of them? Society has to pay the price of such neglect. No society can afford a foolish extravaganza of this scale. The white-collar dream has been heavily oversubscribed – to tragic limits (*Bamboo of Dandakaranya - Vinoo kaley*). Heimendorf laments that the education imparted to the tribals is no way useful to help the community efforts in redressing their grievances with government or non-tribals.

While officials have done considerable efforts in Utnoor, officials and NGOs have done tremendous work in mid Godavari basin i.e. the agency area of East Godavari, West Godavari and Khammam districts. The state sponsored deforestation was stopped in East Godavari district by 1993 through legal action. The tribal land rights movement forced the government to distribute land records to the tribals in West Godavari and Khammam districts enabling them to identify the lands under the occupation of non tribals to be distributed to them. NGO SAKTI started educating the tribals on forest rules and land survey methods.

All political parties including naxalites are working for the poor not exclusively for tribals. So they feel that the non tribal occupants shouldn't be disturbed. The civil liberties groups are working for human rights not very much for the economic rights of tribals.

The state is ruthless in displacing the tribals under various irrigation projects and mining (coal) activities. As per the L.T.R. only tribal cooperatives are eligible to get land in the scheduled areas of A.P. But Supreme Court in Samatha case (1997), allowed transfer of land to government corporations in tribal areas facilitating mining and tourism etc. activities. Though the government of Orissa passed orders for rehabilitation of displaced tribals complying with the apex court directions – so far A.P. government did not take up such measures. Mining licenses for minor minerals are being issued to tribes without regulating the trading by non tribals.

Since 1990, the papermills switched over from bamboo to farm plantations. Lakhs of tribals extracting bamboo lost their livelihoods. Minor irrigation projects are constructed for the benefit of non-tribals while the tribals are displaced and their lands are being submerged. The water sources in the hill areas are drying up. It is rightly observed,

“Unless quick action is taken, several hundred square kilometers of tribal homelands will become depopulated, leaving a vast degraded landmass behind.”

- Sanjiv J Phansalkar, Shilp Verma, “Improved Water Control as Strategy for Enhancing Tribal Livelihoods”, Economic and Political Weekly, July 31, 2004

The Polavaram is a major project which submerges the tribal areas to provide irrigation to the non-tribals in the command area.

While the resource are fast depleting, the cost of living is increasing due to the developing infrastructures and inflow of consumer goods. The MFP (Minor Forest Produce) has come down. G.C.C. is struggling for survival. The tribal is unable to compete in the market with non-tribals. Government is the major employer. But it is not paying minimum wages. The 'local groups' arbitrate for less than minimum wages. Many campaigners with diverse slogans are confusing tribals without enabling them to use the tools of governance and develop capabilities to deal with the state.

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THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE FREEDOM STRUGGLES IN TRIBAL AREAS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

1) Disturbances in Parlakimidi and Srikakulam (1832)

“In the year 1832 the disturbances which had been for some time existing, to a greater or less extent, in the Purlakimidi Zamindary in Ganjam – and in certain parts of the district of Vizagapatam, rose to such a height that government were compelled to order a Military force into the field for their repression.

By the middle of the year 1834, tranquility was in great measure restored.

In the end of 1835 the Goomsur disturbances broke out

Mr. Russell, who was the Member of Council, expressed his willingness to undertake the duty, and he was accordingly invested again with the special powers he had held on the previous occasion, to be exercised in the Ganjam district wherever open rebellion existed.” (pp. i)

- *Selections from the records of the Madras Government, published by authority No. XXIV, Reports on the Disturbances in Purlakimedy, Vizagapatam and Goomsoor in 1832-36 by Mr. G. E. Russell, Vol I, 1856.*

2) The Golgondah Disturbances in Visakha district (1845-48 and 1857-58)

99. The Golgondah taluq formed one of the most ancient Zamindaries in our territory; and at the Permanent Settlement, a Sanad was granted to the Chief, fixing the peshcush at 1,000 rupees. In the country at the foot of the hills, the Zamindar's authority was complete, but in the hills the renters had gradually assumed a considerable degree of independence. In the year 1836, the incapacity of the Zamindar, Ananta Bhupati, brought the estate to the verge of ruin; and he was induced by the district officers to resign, in favour of Jamma Devamma, the widow of a predecessor. This election was highly distasteful to the hill Sardars; firstly, because they were not consulted; and secondly, because the succession in former times was always through heirs male. Troubles of all kinds thickened around the unfortunate Ranee, and it was not long before she was carried off to the jungles by a party of hill peons, and there barbarously murdered.

100. Upon this, troops were moved into the neighbourhood, and the estate sequestered by the Collector, Mr. Freese. The Zamindar, Ananta Bhupati, was brought to trial for abetting the Ranee's murder, and, being convicted, was sent as a prisoner for life to the fort of Ghooty, where he subsequently died. Averse to entering upon the administration of a hill Zamindary, the Collector proposed to give the estate to Vira Bhupathi, son of a former Zamindar, Shanta Bhupati. The Government did not acquiesce in the suggestion; and in the following year 1837, the Zamindary was put up to public auction for arrears of revenue, and knocked down to Government for the sum of 100 rupees.

101. The hill Sirdars were not disturbed in their tenures by the officers of government, but they were not long in discovering that the extinction of their ancient Chiefs had seriously lowered their own status. They were now directly subject to the surveillance of the Collector's native Amin: and some slight show of inconsideration to one of their party, brought about a hostile confederation. They united to raise an insurrection against the Government, for the restoration of the Bhupati family. Rents were withheld, the hills barricaded against all comers, and constant excursions, with fire and sword, carried into the villages in the plains. "Chinna Bhupati", a lad of nineteen, and half-brother of the 'Vira Bhupati' already mentioned; was set up by the insurgents as their 'Rajah', and for three years, or from 1845 to 1848, they successfully held their jungles against the military force employed against them; abandoning the enterprise at last on the condition of amnesty to all concerned. Chinna Bhupati yielded himself up; and some villages producing 4,000 Rupees a year were assigned him as a maintenance for himself and his brothers, the representatives of the ancient Zamindars of Golconda.

102. Once more in 1857-58, an insurrection broke out under the leadership of Sanyasi Bhupati, nephew of Chinna Bhupati. The Sibbandis, under Captain Owen, assisted by some of the leading Sirdars in the hills, promptly put it down. Sanyasi Bhupati and Chinna Bhupati were sentenced by the then Agent to the Governor, (MR. Reade) to transportation for life; but the Government (1701, 21st December 1859) remitted punishment, and ordered them to be detained as quasi State prisoners, under surveillance, at Vizagapatam." (pp 256-257)

- *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteers – a manual of the District of Vizagapatam in the Presidency of Madras (Originally published in 1869), State Editor, District Gazetteers, Andhra Pradesh (Reprinted in 1994)*

3) Rampa Rebellion (-1879)

The disturbed area now comprised over 5000 square miles of wooded and hilly country. The operations of the troops were much hampered by the nature of the ground, and the malcontents took advantage of their superior knowledge of the country to maintain a harassing guerilla warfare, avoiding all direct encounters with the troops, but attacking isolated police stations and burning or looting the villages of those who assisted the authorities. Troops were hastened up to the country, and by the end of 1879 the government forces included, besides several hundred police drafted from neighbouring districts, as many as six regiments of Madras Infantry, two companies of Sappers and Miners, and a squadron of cavalry and a wing of infantry from the Hyderabad Contingent.

The chief leaders of the insurgents were four notorious characters named Chandrayya, Sirdar Jangam Pulicanta Sambayya, Tammanna dora and Ambul Reddi of Boduluru. The second of these was arrested as early as April 29th 1879. Chandrayya, however, scored many successes in the Yellavaram division at the beginning of May, and succeeded in burning Addateegala police station. He was nearly captured in the middle of that month, but in June he shut up a party of police under a European officer for some days in Addateegala. The spread of the disaffection to Rekhapalle and Dutcharthi and the fear that the hill tribes of Polavaram division might join the insurgents, led to strenuous efforts on the part of the authorities, and troops were moved up from all sides. The northern and eastern frontiers of the Rampa country were occupied by strong detachments of sepoys, and military posts were established along the banks of the Godavari and Saveri. At the

same time Mr. Sullivan, First Member of the Board of Revenue, was appointed (in July 1879) to visit the district and ascertain the real causes of the trouble and suggest remedies for it. The steps he took, which included the deposition of the mansabdar and a promise that the muttadars should thenceforth deal directly with government, did much to allay the excitement, and before the end of August 1879 as many as 70 of Chandrayya's men had been captured, and Rampa was comparatively quiet.

Rekhapalli was also pacified about the same time, and the apprehended rising the Polavaram did not take place. The remaining rebels were now driven north to the hills of Golconda and Jeypore. Ambul Reddi was captured in November 1879 and Chandrayya was killed in February 1880. their removal broke the back of the trouble. Disturbances went on in a desultory fashion in the Vizagapatam district, and in October 1880 Tamman dora made a brief incursion into that part of the country. But by November 1880 quiet was finally and everywhere restored.

- *District Gazetteers Godavari, By F.R.Hemingway, I.C.S., printed by the Superintendent, Government press, Madras, 1907.*

4) Rebellion led by Alluri Seetharama Raju (1922-24)

There were 38 villages of Gudem taluk, 6 of Golugonda taluk, 16 of Yellavaram taluk of Visakhapatnam and one of Peddapuram taluk in the Godavari district – in all 61 villages were subjected to punitive tax. (p 98)

Convictions during the rebellion:

Out of the 276 people convicted a maximum number of ten were from Gudem, eight from Gannerlapalem, seven each from Makavaram, Thallapalem, six each from Vanakarai and Gummadiguda, five each from Nadimpalem, Dakarai and Nagapuram, four each from Dokkaluru, Kommangi, Old Krishnadevipeta, Ramannapalem and Sarika Mallavaram, three each from Ankampalem, Damanapalli, Katragadda, Gorsingi, Padi, Singanapalli, Sirapalli, Vemalapudi, Potharam, Koppikonda, Kunarapuram and Guddapalle.

In all 186 villages were affected. Many of the villagers were interred under a single section of the I.P.C. while the more active of them came under more than once section, as 121, 121A, 122, 143, 145, 147, 148 and 395 (Madras Legislative Council Proceedings 1925). (pp.xxv)

- *Mangamma J. Dr., 1983, Alluri Seetharama Raju, published by R. Parthasarathy, IAS, Commissioner, A.P. State Archives, Hyderabad – 500 007*

Naxal Movement

The Naxalite revolt was centred mainly in Srikakulam District during 1968 – 70. Srikakulam District is the northern most district of Andhra Pradesh and borders on Orissa.

Victim'sation of Tribals

In the process of suppressing the movement, a heavy police force was deployed by the Government. The tribesmen were harassed frequently by the police, for information about the whereabouts of the Naxalites and about the local sympathizers. In the course of their combing operation, the people complained that the police had taken away all their goats and cocks. A number of tribesmen were killed in encounters and hundreds of them were arrested. A number of their villages were burnt down. The tribesmen complained that whenever the police suspected that they were loyal to the Naxalites, they used to punish them and even used to burn their villages so that the supply lines were permanently cut. On the other hand whenever the Naxalites suspected that any villagers opposed their activity they used to burn down their village in the process of 'eliminating the enemy'. The tribesmen were caught in the middle and were the worst sufferers.

When the Naxalite movement was at its height many *sahukars* had fled from the area leaving their properties. It was considered a 'victory' by the Naxalites and successful demonstration of their ideology. But after the movement was suppressed all the *sahukars* came back to the villages and they are now renewing their contacts with the tribesmen, and have started their business in the old form. The tribesmen too are going to the *sahukars* for 'help'. The land that was restored to the tribals by the Naxalites slowly went back to the former *sahukars* and the tribals have again gone back to being agricultural labourers, tenant cultivators and final'y dependents on the forest for their food.

- Tribal Movements in Andhrapradesh – P.Kamala Manohar Rao and D.L. Prasad Rao

5) The tribal Land rights movement in West Godavari and Khammam districts (1995-)

Readers will remember the cases of MROs and Sub-Inspectors being kidnapped by tribals, crops harvested by them, police shooting at tribals. Bows, arrows and spears - reminiscent of the great Rampa revolt, were again freely used. But this time, the might of the State represented by its gun-trotting police, their dreaded lock-ups, the rigmarole of court proceedings and the double talking politicians could not cow the tribals down. The help given by SAKTI in reading the records, analyzing the documents, legal help to get bail and fight court cases, was enough to tip the balance.

- *Geetha Ramaswamy, Deccan Chronical July 23, 2000*

6) Bebijhari uprising in the tribal areas of Adilabad district (1940) & Indravelly incident (1997)

Dispossession of lands, disbandment of villages, infiltration and exploitation by non-tribals, lack of skills and opportunities for alternative avenues of subsistence, inaccessibility of reserve forests for cultivation and the undermining of traditional status and authority of Raj Gonds have aroused bitterness, resentment and despair among the tribals. The tribals revolted against the powers that ruled (Haimendorf, 1945) at Babijhari in 1940 and 10 tribals were killed during the police action. (p.201)

In case of Babijhari, the conflict arose as a result of Forest Policy which denied the tribal groups of their existence. By the time of Indravelly incident also, the local tribal's existence is threatened by the non-tribal intruder. While the first conflict is with a government policy, the second conflict is with alien communities. The unequal distribution of privileges and rights has lead to sentiments of hostility (Coser: 1964:37) in the second conflict. (p.209)

The Babijhari and Indravelly incidents differ in their structures also. The Babijhari was a sporadic uprising resulting from sudden imposition of a Forest Policy. The shock to tribals due to sudden disposition from their own lands took expression in the shape of a rebellion. In case of Indravelly, the exploitation has been taking place over years but it took enormous proportions with the recognition of the powerful non-tribal community as a Scheduled Tribe. As the tribal group as a whole was living in isolation with only the Gond chiefs in contact with outside world at the time of Babijhari, the rebellion was sporadic. But by the time of Indravelly incident, the local tribal society became a 'part society' (Part Society as defined by Red field 1965) because of opening up of tribal area, introduction of various programmes and tribals coming into contact with various types of outsiders. The tribals became aware of the outside society and prone to easy contact and influence of outside society.

- Sastry V N V K Dr., 1989, *Between Gond Rebellions*, pp.201, Udyama publications, Hyderabad.
