

THE KISAN STRUGGLES IN ANDHRA PRADESH – A STUDY OF KISAN STRUGGLES OF MUNAGALA AND CHALLAPALLI ZAMINDARIES

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INTRODUCTION

India is predominantly an agrarian country where 70 per cent of its population still depends on agriculture for its livelihood. They are differentiated in terms of their relationship with the ownership of land such as owners–cultivators, share croppers, tenants and landless labourers. In local parlance, they are known as kisans which is often translated as peasant in English.

Historically the peasant movements in India can broadly be grouped in three distinct phases. The initial phase (1857-1921). This phase was characterised by the sporadic growth of peasant movements in the absence of proper leadership, the second phase (1923-1946). This phase was marked by the emergence of the class conscious peasant organisations. Its distinct feature was that during this period peasant movements were led by people who gave priority to kisan problems in the struggle for national liberation post-Independence phase. This era witnessed the uninterrupted continuity of the agrarian movements due to the failure of the ruling classes to resolve any of the basic problems of the toiling masses in rural India. The peasant struggles in this period were led predominantly by left political parties the Communist of Party of India (CPI), Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Socialist Party (SP) through their kisan organisations.

In 1870, the kisan movement began in the East Bengal. The peasants fought with the Bengal zamindars against all kinds of exploitation and demanded for the abolition of land tax and as a result of the movement for the first time, the tenant act was framed in 1885.

The tyranny of the zamindars along with the exorbitant rates of British land revenue led to a series of spontaneous peasant upsprings in different parts of the country during this period. The periodic recurrence of the famines coupled with the economic depression during the last decades of the 19th century further aggravated the situation in the rural areas and consequently led to a numerous peasant revolts.

In 1917-18, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress led two significant peasant struggles. The struggle against the Indigo planters and in champaran district of Bihar and thereafter the satyagraha movement of peasants in

Keira against the collection of land revenue which they were unable to pay due to failure of crops.

The policies of ruling classes safeguarding the interests of Zamindars and landlords led to the emergence of independent class organisations of kisans in rural India. They felt that to protect the interests of the kisans, their own class organisation and leadership must be evolved. Consequently, the kisan organisations came into existence in different parts of the country. The first kisan congress held at Lucknow in 1935 led to the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha.

Kisan sabha launched significant struggles in various parts of the country. In Andhra, it launched an anti-settlement agitation against zamindars, a heroic movement led by swamy Sahajananda for the abolition of zamindari system in Bhilwar and against the oppressive forest-laws in South India in 1927. Similarly, in U.P. and other parts of India struggles were launched against the tyranny of zamindars.

The political pressure of kisan sabha succeeded in the Faizpur Congress and paved the way for formulation of the congress agrarian programme. However, the congress could not under the pressure of the native landlords grant any radical concessions to the peasant demands, at the cost of jeopardising the interests of zamindars. This was reflected in the performance of congress during the short period in office before independence.

In 1942, Indian kisans responded to the congress call of civil disobedience movement heroically. They have formed parallel governments in several states.

In post-independence era government has not only failed in providing relief to the farmers and agricultural labourers, but its agrarian policy has aggravated their miseries. Consequently, Indian agrarian society is seeming with discontent even after independence. This has led to a series of peasant struggles in different parts of the country.

In the post-independence period, the peasant movement in Andhra inherited a heavy backlog of problems from the pre-independence period and was confronted by new ones. The anti-feudal struggles that took place in different parts of Andhra is not an

exception and the struggle against the Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli is a clear example.

The people of Munagala and Challapalli fought against the tyranny of these Rajas. The struggles were started prior to the Indian independence and continued even after the independence. Decades of these anti-feudal struggles continued with immense sacrifices made by the people with martyrdom of 89 people. Most of the political parties at various stages took part in these struggles and of course the communists were in the forefront and led these struggles.

OBJECTIVES

1. To review the kisan struggles in India.
2. To study and critically examine the nature of exploitation of the Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli.
3. To study the Socio-Economic, Political and cultural conditions of the people of Munagala paragana and Challapalli Estate.
4. To study the role of various political institutions, Kisan organisations, in the struggle against Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli.
5. To understand the role played by the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party in the struggle against Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Quite a good number of works have come on the Kisan struggles of our nation. It is a known fact that the Kisan struggles of various parts of our nation is also an integral part of Indian independence movement. Various Kisan organisations and also political parties especially the undivided communist party organised and also mobilised the toiling masses of rural India to wage a struggle against the inhuman exploitation of these Rajas.

Many important factors have come to the forefront due to these struggles. Some of these important anti-feudal struggles have been left without any research. The Kisan struggles against the Rajas of Munagala Paragana and Challapalli Estate were such struggles which need the attention of researchers of history. Hence, this study is taken up to understand the tyranny the peoples of Munagala and Challapalli underwent which

enabled to think to go deep into the details of this historic anti feudal struggles and hence, this research has been undertaken.

It must be stated that this study has some limitations. The Munagala paragana and Challapalli Estate kisan struggles which took place between 1928 and 1985 were not broadly covered by the national or international print media of that time. They were covered by only a few Telugu journals and dailies such as Swathantrabharat, Navasakti, Prajasakti, Visalandhra, Kooli dandu Andhra Patrika, Zameen Rytu, Andhra Prabha and Krishna Patrika. The news and articles published about the struggles by these respective journals and dailies from 1930 to till date are the major resources for the research.

The second limitation is that most of the literature available on these topics is only in Telugu language with few exceptions. There is no alternative but to use them as secondary data, available in Telugu language. Thirdly, less attention was paid on the research of anti-feudal struggles in Andhra Pradesh. Because of this reason that main focus was given on the anti-feudal struggles of the people against the Rajas of Munagala Paragana and Challapalli Estate. The Kisan struggle, that took place against the Raja of Challapalli, was waged for long years in three phases.

METHODOLOGY

The method that is adopted in the study is historical and analytical. The data that is used in this dissertation is mostly from the published and unpublished documents and also consulted the records in the State Archives at Hyderabad and Madras. Similarly, referred to various Telugu daily newspapers and also journals to secure the required material for the research work.

Interviews were recorded from some of the living veterans who waged a struggle against the Raja of Munagala Paragana and the Raja of Challapalli. The researcher had visited the oldest libraries in Andhra i.e., Vetapalem, Town Hall Library, Government Arts College Library, Gowthami Libraries of Rajahmundry. Sundaraiah Vignan Bhavan at Bhaglingampalli, Hyderabad, visited various libraries in Vijayawada and Visalandhra

Press, Prajasakthi Press, together the information about these historic Anti-feudal struggles and also consulted various journals.

CHAPTERISATION

The thesis is presented in **eight chapters**.

The **First chapter** introduces in brief, the peasant movements in India, the role of the Indian National Congress in peasant movements, the emergence of class conscious organisations and the kisan struggles in Post-Independence era. The need for the research study along with objectives and research methodology adopted to study the objectives and the review of literature are discussed in this chapter.

The **Second Chapter** reviews the kisan struggles in India. The peasant struggles of British India i.e., Indigo Revolt, peasant revolt in Pabra, Maratha peasant uprisings, Tenant struggles, Agrarian movements in Bengal, Moppla rebellion etc., were vividly discussed. The tribal revolts and post-Independence kisan struggles were also widely discussed in this chapter.

In the **Third chapter** Socio-Economic, Political-Cultural environment under the zamindary rule in Munagala paragona was explained. The social conditions, political conditions and economic conditions that were prevailed in Munagala paragona was discussed. The contributions of the Munagala Raja for the cultural development has been elaborated.

The **Fourth chapter** of the thesis deals with the Socio-Economic and Political Environment under the Zamindary rule in Challapalli. The various struggles like the Dhaka struggle that took place against the Raja has been discussed. The role of the Challapalli Raja in pre- and post-independent politics has been thoroughly exposed. The farmers struggles and the role of communists were explained in this chapter.

The **Fifth chapter** brings out the details of the martyrs of kisan struggles against the zamindars of Munagala and Challapalli. The sacrifices made by the martyrs are clearly brought out.

In the **Sixth Chapter**, the role played by various political parties i.e., the Indian National Congress, Justice Party and the Communists in the kisan struggles was critically examined. The approach and the perceptions of political parties towards the problems of the people of Munagala paraganas is elaborated.

The **Seventh Chapter** discusses how the communists fought against the tyranny of the Raja of Challapalli. Two major aspects were discussed. One is how the Raja of Challapalli played his tricks to suppress the mass movements against him and also the litigant role played by him to safeguard his surplus lands. Secondly, the role of the communists in mobilising the toiling masses to organise the militant struggle against the Raja of Challapalli, their role in legal matters to protect the interests of the poor people and the heroic sacrifices made by them in the struggle against the Raja of Challapalli.

The **Eighth Chapter** presents a Summary and Conclusion of the thesis.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies on peasant movements in India are of recent origin. Most of the studies have been published after the mid-seventies. In the literature, a large number of studies are available on certain regions such as Bihar, Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Malabar, certain movements such as the Indigo movement in Bengal and Bihar by (Mishra 1968, Kling 1977, Miltter S. K. 1978, Natrajan 1979) the Moplah rebellion in Malabar, Kerala (Gopalan 1921, Dale 1975, Hardgrave 1977, Chowdhary S. 1979, Hitchcock 1983). The Tebhaga movement in Bengal (Dhanagare 1976, Sarkar 1979, Custers 1987), the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh (Rao R. 1992, Dhanagare 1974, Elliott 1974, Pavier 1981), the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh (Das Gupta B. 1974, Ghosh 1974, Banerjee S. 1980, Sengupta P. 1983).

Historical analysis of peasant struggles from different perspectives are offered by Kaviraj in 1972, Sunilsen in 1972 and B.B. Chowdari in 1973 on West Bengal, Arvind Das 1983 and Henningham 1982 on Bihar; N.G. Ranga 1949 on Andhra and by Namboodripad 1943, Oommen 1985 and Kannan 1988 on Kerala. A number of detailed case studies on different peasant struggles in pre-and post-independence periods in different parts of the country are now available.

Moore's contention regarding the 'passive' and 'docile' character of Indian peasants, however has been challenged by Kathleen Gough (1974), A. R. Desai (1979), D. N. Dhanagare (1983), Ranajit Guha (1983) and others. They argue that historians have over-looked a number of peasant rebellions before and during the British rule. Kathleen Gough argues that peasant revolts have been common during the last two centuries in every state of present day India.

As far as Andhra Pradesh is concerned several Kisan movements have taken place in different parts of Andhra. Several published and unpublished works are available in this area. Some works have been published in Telugu language on various Kisan struggles that have taken place in Andhra area.

In 1976, Kalapala Surya Prakasa Rao of Machilipatnam has written a book on History of freedom struggle in Krishna district. Martyrs of Munagala Paragana, a book written by Tatavarti Venkateswara Rao was also published in 1981 and also he has written in 1981 another book on "History of the People's Struggle in Munagala Paragana". Another important contribution made by Y.V. Krishna Rao in the year 1981 was the Kisan struggles in Andhra Pradesh before independence. Famous communist leaders like P. Sundaraiah, C. Rajeswara Rao, Raavi Narayana Reddy, D. Venkateswara Rao, Kavuri Kutumba Rao and others have written and published books on heroic Telangana armed struggle.

Economic and social effects of Jagirdari abolition and land reform in Hyderabad '1973, A.M. Khuro'. Tragedy of Hyderabad "Laik Ali, 1962". Communism in India, New Delhi 'Mohan Ram' Nalgonda and Devarapalli talukas 'Settlement reports 1901' storm over Hyderabad. Bomtrey 'Thaper Ramesh 1948' memories of Hyderabad Freedom struggle, Popular Prakashan written by Tirtha Swamy Ramananda.

Quite a good number of articles have been published on Kisan struggles, in various newspapers and journals like Krishna Patrika, Andhra Patrika, Bharati, Navasakti, Prajasakthi, Swatantra Bharat, Visalandhra etc.

In this work, the researcher has taken up the Kisan struggles of Munagala Paragana and Zamindar of Challapalli, also part and parcel of Indian Kisan struggles in

its content and meaning. But so far few books and also few more unpublished documents are available in this area. No research work so far has been taken up by any scholar on this important kisan struggle of Munagala and Challapalli. Having read few books on this struggle, I am convinced to undertake a research on the Kisan struggle of Munagala and Challapalli people.

Several authors through their published and unpublished documents have given lot of information about kisan struggles though some studies have been published on the struggles of Munagala Paragana and Zamindar of Challapalli, a comprehensive study, is yet to be made to cover all the aspects of the struggles. My work is a continuation of that process. It is sincerely felt that few more new details are to be added to the existing literature on this struggle.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

India is a country where majority of the people depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Agrarian relations played an important role in the social and economic life of the society. Due to long years of colonial rule, these agrarian relations had become antagonistic among the various sections of the society.

The creation of Zamindary system by the British rulers, to serve their own interests, created a gulf among the rural masses. The emergence of Zamindary system had led to the cruel exploitation of the peasantry and the agricultural labourers of rural India.

Mahatma Gandhi and several other prominent national leaders took part in the struggle against the Zamindars. Such struggles have been organised in several parts of the country for the emancipation of rural poor.

Andhra is not an exception. The kisan struggles took place against the Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli are prominent. The people waged long battles for their just demands under the leadership of communists and kisan sabhas. The Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli used the coercive methods and exploited the people. Farmers had been cultivating the lands of the zamindars and they were subjected to pay heavy taxes. The artisans and the people living in the villages and engaged in their cast professions were

forced to do free services. “Vetti” or bonded labour has been imposed on the people. The employees working with Rajas and his goondas with their muscle power occupied the lands of the people and whoever protested it they were subjected to all types of harassment including social boycott. The Rajas threatened the people by filing criminal cases without any reason. Their servants were not even hesitant to molest the women folk in the villages. Farmers were not allowed to use the water from tanks for their crops. The wages were so meagre not even sufficient to maintain their livelihood. Usury capital played havoc with the lives of the farmers. All rights including civil and criminal powers were rested with the zamindars.

Social oppression and the economic degradation led to the emergence of social protest. Slowly village farmers associations have been organised to defend their rights. The ‘Zameen Rytu’ Organisation was formed in 1928. Villagers started organising squads to defend themselves. People belonged to various professions joined ‘Zameen Rytu’ association. With the inspiration given by the communist party people stopped working as bonded labourers. People became bold and started resisting the goondas of the Zamindar. Among the people of the estate villages new inspiration could be seen. They started even boycotting slowly the functions organised by the Rajas. People were organised to participate in satyagraha against the atrocities committed by the Rajas and their followers.

The Kisan organisations slowly developed contacts with political parties. Communists organised kisans and agricultural labourers against the zamindars. They educated the people through political schools and cultural programmes. Communists through their selfless sacrifices inspired the people against Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli. In the struggles, the Community Party lost many of its cadres. Due to prolonged struggle against the Rajas of Munagala and Challapalli because of immense sacrifices made by the people the bondage has been abolished, the tenants retained their rights on their lands. Social oppression and atrocities on people were fought back and finally the zamindari system was abolished.

Initially, the Challapalli Zamindar used the goondas against the kisans and he felt that they are useless the Challapalli Raja resorted to use the corrupt police officers. They too could not resist the united strength of the farmers.

The Challapalli Zamindar adopted various cunning tactics and occupied the lands of farmers of various villages. This has been done on the pretext that the farmers are not paying taxes. The farmers were implicated in criminal cases and used all nasty tricks to divide them. With the help of VDO's he occupied 'Ghotakam' lands in Ghantasala village. The farmers bitterly fought against this and won the lands through legal battles.

In 1920, the Kisan Mandal Mahasabha held at Pedakallepalli passed a resolution to abolish the zamindari system. In 1935, the zamindar kisan Maha sabha was held in Potarlanka of Divi taluka, the zamindar tried his best to break this meeting but due to the unity of farmers he could not succeed in it.

The east bank canal was dug from Yanamalakuduru and the Aqueduct was constructed at Puligadda and thus the water was supplied to Diviseema. The Zamindar forced the farmers to pay him '*Nazarana*' for the new lands brought into cultivation with this irrigation facility. The farmers fought against it and won.

On 26th January, 1939 C. Rajagopalachari declared in the Assembly on Zamindari enquiry report. He categorically stated that Zamindars had no right on the lands. He further stated that they are only government employees. Rajaji also argued that no compensation should be paid to the zamindars. But this was not implemented.

The left, socialist youngmen of the congress Party was fed up with the liberal attitude of the leaders and with their indifference towards the zamindar. During the period between 1939-41, the taluk farmers organisation was taken over by the left young leaders. The British government issued arrest warrants against them. They fought against the British Imperialism and Zamindars.

The Zamindar made a serious proposal to avict the Mudiraja labourers of Mangalapuram of Divi Taluka. They were cultivating his lands from 1942. Communist leaders stood firmly and supported the agricultural labourers and they were implicated in

criminal cases and were sent to jail. The communists fought against the “Namu system” and made all attempts to liberate the agricultural labourers from the clutches of exploitation of the landlords. In 1944, All India Kisan Sabha conference was held at Vijayawada and inspired the farmers.

The Challapalli Zamindar occupied six thousand acres of land in the Lanka villages and not cultivated these lands. He leased them to the farmers and had taken promissory notes from the farmers and even after paying the lease the zamindar would not return their promissory notes. He further wanted to sell the lands expecting that the congress government would pass a resolution to cancel the wastelands. The farmers came to know this information and informed the kisan leaders. The Chief Minister Prakasam Pantulu promised the kisan leaders that he would support them but he did not and he blamed the kisan leaders and the farmers were occupying the zamindar lands. In 1947, the preventive detention ordinance was passed, the activists of kisan organisations and also some congress leaders were arrested and were sent to Rayavellore jail.

The lanka farmers did not yield to the police orders and the threat of zamindar goondas. So many false cases were filed against the farmers. In the police firings, Viyyamma and few others were shot dead. Many activists of Communist Party, farmers were detained. The farmers of the Estate were not afraid of the repression let loose against them. The farmers occupied the lands and cultivated the lands.

The zamindari system was abolished in 1949 while giving the severe punishments to the farmers. The farmers were again deceived. The assurance of Rajagopalachari in 1939 was not implemented. On the other hand, the government accepted to give lakhs of rupees as compensation, the pattas for thousands of acres to the zamindars. For that a special act was made. The supporters of zamindar, the great leaders who led the struggles against Raja were shot dead. The zamindar wanted to settle and secure everything before the kisan leaders were to be released from jails.

The Challapalli Zamindar claimed that he had seventeen thousand acres of land and filed a case in court for issue of pattas to these lands. The court did not agree with

this and issued orders to give pattas to only ten thousand acres. The Raja of Challapalli sold between 1950 and 1960 nearly six thousand acres of land.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh had introduced land reforms and these reforms had come into effect from January 1971. The Challapalli sugar factory which belongs to the Zamindar lands also taken into the Land Reforms Act. Before the first land reforms act made, the Zamindar had sold 1,200 acres of land out of 3,918 acres which was allotted to the sugar factory. The labour organisations, the communist party, Agricultural labour organisations fought against the zamindar. They demanded that the extra lands, waste lands and the lands under sugar factory should be distributed.

Andhra Pradesh government recognised the excess land of 2,650 acres which was in the disposal of sugar factory according to the land reforms Act. The management appealed to various courts and lost the cases. On the other hand, with the active role of communists all party committee was formed and they had mobilised the people to struggle against the Zamindar. People have entered into the surplus lands of sugar factory and occupied the lands. The all party co-ordination committee persuaded the Chief Minister, N.T. Rama Rao and the surplus lands of the zamindar's sugar factory was distributed by N.T. Rama Rao in 1985.

Communists made immense sacrifices in the fight against the Zamindar, lost eighty nine people in these glorious struggle and hundreds and thousands of people were imprisoned. Ultimately, they succeeded in the distribution of surplus lands of the Challapalli Zamindar as well as Munagala paragona. These struggles prove to be the peoples movements. The virtuous and innocent people are the champions at the end after a long blood dripping revolts. The landless poor peasants have been in possession with some area of land proving the principle land to the tiller.

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