

Chapter–VI

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN MUNAGALA PARAGANA KISAN STRUGGLE

The Zamindar of Munagala was active in politics and involved in freedom movement since his assumption of the Zamindari.¹ But his love for literature or his urge for freedom did not deter him from fleecing his estate peasants with exorbitant rents and forced labour. The legal battles in which he was involved for nearly forty years from 1890 to 1931 with his relatives regarding succession issue drained his treasury.² The burden of filling his coffers fell upon his tenants. Moreover, as the estate was adjacent to the Nizam territories, the novel methods of exploitation, like *vetti*, were adopted.³ The acute grievances of the peasantry got accumulated during depression period. It was also a period which witnessed the growth of organised peasant movement in the Andhra area in the wake of non-cooperation movement and following the activities of educated persons, like N.G. Ranga from peasant families.

Despite being a Congress sympathiser, he suppressed the infant peasant organisation labelling it as an outfit of Congress, to protect his citadel. The main target of his attack were the organisers of Munagala Zamin Ryot Association (MZRA). Many peasants were beaten, many more were evicted from their lands, some were banished from the estate and some others were socially boycotted.⁴ One Kollu Ramayya, owner of 30 acres was forced to sign an agreement that he would never join any peasant organisation in future, failing which his 30 acres would be taken over by the Zamindar.⁵ Collective fines were imposed on some other peasants. Exit and entry points of a number

¹ Venkateswara Rao, T. (1981). "*Munagala Paragana Praja Vudyama Charitra*", Kakatiya Publishers, Kodad, p.13.

² Ayyadevara Kaleswara Rao, "*Naajivita Katha-Navyandhramu*", Vijayawada, 1959, p.53.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

⁴ Prasada Rao, Nanduri (1946). *Andhralo Rytu Vudyamam*, Hyderabad, pp.15, 16.

⁵ Venkateswara Rao, Tatavarthy (1981). *Op. Cit.*, pp.20, 22.

of peasant houses were sealed with thrones until the fines were collected.⁶ Immadi Papayya, who was the President of this first MZRA was one of the worst victims of Zamindar's fury. His 18 acres of land was appropriated by the Zamindar. Gelli Konayya, the General Secretary of the association too lost his land to Zamindar's aggression. False cases were filed against several people in civil and criminal courts.⁷

However, the peasants did not lose heart over the aborted attempt of having a union. The events occurring around their estate was enthusing the peasants. The peasants marches, rallies, tours of leaders, press publicity, peasant schools and mobilising techniques kept the tempor of the estate's tenants alive. The elections to Madras Presidency Assembly in 1937 aroused their hopes and aspirations.

Though Congress Provincial leaders did not campaign in Munagala for its candidate, as per the agreement reached between them and the Zamindar,⁸ local leaders and Congress volunteers and members of district CSP toured length and breadth of the estate and gave wide publicity of Congress election manifesto which assured the peasants the needed protection from Zamindars. The Congress candidate Katragadda Venkata Narayana's victory in the elections boosted the morale of the peasantry. Another effect of this elections was that Socialists and other peasant-minded Congress leaders came into direct contact with the peasants of Munagala and they also came to learn the situation prevailing there. By this time, local Congress organisations came under the influence of Communists.⁹

⁶ *Zamin Ryot*, 4-4-1954.

⁷ Venkateswara Rao Tatavarthy, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 20-22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹ Krishna Rao, Y.V. (1981). "Andhra Pradeshlo Swathamtraniki Mundu Rytu Poratalu – Rytu Sanghalu", Vijayawada, p.450.

The Zamindar also intensified harassing the peasantry by implicating them in false cases and forcibly stopping demonstrations. He rejected all appeals for postponement of rent collections. The estate employees entered peasant houses and forcibly took ornaments against rents. The families of office bearers of MZRA came under special attack.¹⁰ But this did not deter the peasant defiant mood, unlike in early Thirties.

A classical example of this sort of attitude happened in Muangala on Deepavali day in 1938. On every Deepavali, the Zamindar used to perform special prayers to his family's deity Laxminarasimhaswamy, whose temple was located in Repalle village of the estate. As usual, the barbers of that village went to the temple on Deepavali day in 1938 to lit torches. But the estate employees refused to accept their services as the barbers were the members of MZRA and chased them out of the temple. Seeing this, the dhobis who were the traditional carriers of Gods vehicle themselves refused to do their duty and walked out of the temple premises and no barber or dhobi in the entire estate was ready to perform this work and thus the two-day religious procession came to a stand-still in that year.

However, the people of the estate decided to celebrate Deepavali in a variety way. They took Nanduri Prasada Rao, the representative of West Godavari District Congress Committee to Repalle and organised a mammoth procession keeping portraits of Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and N.G. Ranga on bullock carts.¹¹ From now onwards, direct conflict between the Zamindar and the tenants started. Slogans like 'abolition of

¹⁰ *Zamin Ryot*, dt. 2-9-1938 and 2-12-1938.

¹¹ Krishna Rao, Y.V. (1981). "Andhra Pradeshlo Swathamtraniki Mundu Rytu Poratalu – Rytu Sanghalu", Vijayawada, p.452.

Zamindari system', 'down with police atrocities' and 'MZRA Zindabad' rent the air. Under such conditions, a chance came to MZRA to test its strength for the final showdown and that occurred in Kalukova village.¹²

At the end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century the dynamic farmers continued their efforts to struggle through Kisan Organisations. They began to try to solve their short term and long term problems. In Krishna District, several Kisan organisations were formed in the early stages. In October 1905, Taluka Kisan Organisations were formed at Gudivada Taluk. In second phase Krishna District Kisan Association was formed, from then onwards annual conferences were held. Krishna District annual conference of kisans was held in 1919 at Sri Ramamohana Library, Vijayawada. During the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Vijayawada, in 1919 on March 31 Rytu Sangham submitted memorandum at Ramamohana Library. In this memorandum they highlighted the problems which were being faced by the farmers and also they have extended confidence in the Non-co-operation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi.¹³

The Kisan Organisation of Gannavaram Taluq appealed in May 1920 to the kisans to participate in kisan conference held at Mahanandi of Kurnool district. They stated that the problems of kisans would be discussed in this conference. On April 6th, 1919 kisans' public meeting was held at Eemani village of Duggirala Firka in an exclusively erected Pandal. Several representatives from different villages had attended the conference. Kondamudi Sreeramulu, an advocate of Tenali presided over the meeting. In this meeting they passed a resolution to withdraw Rowlat Act and also they stated in the

¹² Zamin Rythu, dt.2-9-1938 to 2-12-1938.

¹³ *Navasakthi*, 1938 daily newspaper.

resolution they would fight against Rowlat act till they withdraw the act. During the first and second Decades of 20th century kisan organisations were formed in Guntur District not only at village level but also at taluk level. The tradition of formation of kisan organisations was not confined to Krishna and Guntur Districts alone but extended to East and West Godavari Districts. To form the Kisan Organisations in East and West Godavari Districts middle range farmers who were educated and politically dynamic stood in the forefront.¹⁴

Kisan Organisations were also formed in the same way in Munagala area to struggle against Zamindars. The Kisan Organisations developed relations with the political parties as a result, the conditions in Munagala had been changed. West Krishna Congress Committee stated that, the congress party had withdrawn the satyagraha. Hence, no congress worker nor even a sympathiser were not supposed to participate in satyagraha. Andhra Congress Committee also stated the fact very clearly. Due to this reason, it was felt that the struggle in Munagala Paragana has not been led by the congress party. Though the congress party had proclaimed its stand, the state kisan organisation or the Krishna district kisan organisation have not responded to this call. The basic question arises here is that the Rytu Sangham of Munagala Paragana alone is solely responsible for organising this movement. Besides this, the congress socialist committees have also not declared anything about their participation in this struggle. It was a known fact that the congress people were in important positions in this organisation. Without their consent how others could take decisions in this matter. Here, in this context a contradiction had come to the fore front whether the Rytu Sangham can

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

violate the decision of the congress or congress can accept the views of the Rytu Sangham. The committee appointed by the congress to resolve such disputes met at Bombay and took a decision that congress people should not join in such organisations. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Acharya Narendra dev sharply reacted on this decision taken at Bombay. They felt that any one can participate in such activity not on the banner of congress party but as an individuals.¹⁵

Of all the activities 'Kisan Yatra' from Itchapuram to Madras was historical. They walked thousands of miles together on foot. Besides, they visited number of villages and several public meetings were convened. Apart from this, District Kisan Yatras were also taken up. In 1937 elections were held to Madras Assembly. In this elections feudal forces who were representing Justice Party and peoples party were totally defeated. Indian National Congress had won with huge majority. The Kisans of Andhra felt that these elections were against the exploitation of Zamindars. Congress promised in its election manifesto to abolish feudalism and introducing basic agrarian reforms. This promises inspired the kisans. They were optimistic and expected then only they might be relieved from the feudal exploitation. It can be said that Congress Party rested into power in Madras just because of the kisans who were against to feudals.¹⁶

But there were differences between Kisan activists and congress leaders. When the Congress sub-committee met at Konakanchi to enquire the Munagala conditions heated exchanges were taken place. At last, there was a voting in favour of report.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Krishna Patrika*, Monthly Magazine, June 17th 1939, Munagala Katha.

¹⁶ Krishna Rao, Y.V. (1981). *Andhra Pradeshlo Swathamtraniki Mundu Rytu Poratalu-Rytu Sanghalu*, Visalandhra Publishing House, Vijayawada, October, p. 33.

¹⁷ Chinniah Suri, Kondaveeti (1986). "*Andhra Pradeshlo Rytu Udyamam*", Vijayawada, p. 71

Communist Party opposed the atrocities of Zamindar on the people of Munagala Paragana. The Communist Party solved many problems of people. One of the veterans who took part in Munagala struggle Chillamcharla Raghunadham in his oral interview said that “I want to explain in detail about the problems faced during the Nizam’s Government after merging Paragana into Nalgonda District. When we fought against Hyderabad Nawab, problems were created by Nizam Government, we thought that Nizam may be imprisoned when the congress Government occupied the Hyderabad state. King Koti was given to him as a compensation inspite of his harassment on people. Due to the dissatisfaction we fought against Nizam government. Several communists were died in the struggle. However, struggle for land was continued. Some lands were distributed by us. In this way, as communists we have acted against Zamindar.”¹⁸

Madras Assembly elections were held in 1946. Munagala Paragana area falls in Gannavaram assembly constituency. Katragadda Venkata Narayana Rao who was M.L.A. in 1937 contested as communist party candidate and P. Sundarayya campaigned for communist candidate. First time, Communist Party contested against congress. By contesting in the elections, communist party had given an encouragement to its sympathisers. Rytu Sangham activists and Paragana party leaders have extensively canvassed in favour of party candidates. The Zamindar of Munagala had canvassed in favour of Congress.¹⁹

¹⁸ Interview with Chillamcherla Raghunatham.

¹⁹ Venkateswara Rao, T. (1981). “*Munagala Paragana Praja Udyama Charitra*”, Kakatiya Publishers, Kodad, p. 80.

During the elections, Communist Party leader Puchalapalli Sundaraiah came to Nadigudem. Several people from Paragana area came for this meeting, such a big public meeting was never organised in the Paragana area. 10,000 men and women attended the meeting. Even the people from Telangana villages had also come to the meeting. Party activists of Suryapeta and Huzurnagar Taluks also attended the meeting. Sundaraiah in his long speech explained about communist party policy and party manifesto. There was a cultural programme after the completion of speeches by District cultural troops. Umamaheswara Rao, Mikkilineni Radhakrishna Murthy, Machineni Venkateswara Rao, Muthaiah and Gopireddy Veeraiah demonstrated the cultural events with the help of lantern. They have explained the atrocities of Zamindar through their cultural programmes. These cultural programmes had inspired and educated the people. Munagala party extended an invitation to Suryapet, Huzurnagar Taluka party activists for canvassing. They were very much pleased and canvassed restlessly along with local activists. In this election, in the Paragana area two-thirds of votes polled in favour of Communist Party. People of this area had shown their dynamism by giving a vote to communist party by seeing how the communist party fought against Zamindar.²⁰

Elections were held to Madras Assembly in 1946, Congress had won by stating in its election manifesto that the mediators between people and government that was Zamindary system would be abolished. During 1939, when the Munagala Satyagraha struggle was going on, the then revenue minister, T. Prakasam who promised to implement the compromise formula, got into power as a chief minister. State Kisan leaders Nanduri Prasada Rao, Munagala Kisan leaders Uppala Ramaiah, Chillamcherla

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

Raghunatham lead the 15 members Kisan team to Madras with a hope that the assurance given by Prakasam, when he was revenue minister would be fulfilled as a chief minister. Delegation submitted memorandum to the chief Minister on 5-11-1946 explaining the incidents that taken place, right from the withdrawing the Satyagraha in 1939 to till that day. Nanduri Prasada Rao explained in-detail how the Zamindar deceived the people and congress. After listening the delegation Chief Minister Prakasam commented that if all the Kisans were united what the Zamindar could do and further said that he would enquire into the matter.²¹

Delegation had also submitted a memorandum to the then revenue minister, K. R. Karantu. He also promised to inform them after enquiry. Again on 11-12-1946 Kisan Organisation wrote a letter to the revenue minister to give reply what decision he had taken on their memorandum. But there was no reply. Meanwhile, people's protection ordinance promulgated. The Ordinance inspired the Zamindar. He sold lands worth of Rs. 3 lakh which were supposed to come as per the agreement of the Brahmaiah award on the tenant lands and against the tenant protection act.²²

Soon after the ban was lifted on communist party in India, Krishna District Communist committee had taken a decision to enrol more members to strengthen the party. As a part of this decision, Tatavarthi Venkateswara Rao was sent to Munagala Paragana. The District leaders severally tried to protect the party from the fraction of Nallapati Venkatarama Narasaiah. The leadership of Krishna district communist committee and kisan organisation were in underground till 1938. They made several

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

efforts to save the communist movement in Munagala area and ultimately they were successful in their endeavour. Communist Party had emerged as a powerful force in the Paragana. District Communist committee had taken all necessary steps to train up their cadres at village level and also at Paragana level. Party had carried its political propaganda among the people. Party had extensively carried its political thinking to various villages. Communist Party tried to know day-to-day problems of the people and by attending to these problems tried to solve them amicably. During this period, General Body meetings of party members used to be held compulsory either once in a month or twice in a month. District Party leaders used to clearly explain the National and International political situation to the party members. They also spoke about the responsibilities of party in the Paragana area. These meetings helped to make the party members more dynamic and to carry out their responsibilities successfully.²³

On behalf of District Communist Party, some one among the following leaders attended the meetings, Vellanki Visweswara Rao, Koneru Rajagopala Rao, V. Venkatarama Sastry, Anumarlapudi Seetha Rama Rao, Kantamaneni Chalapati Rao used to give a report on political and organisational matters. Gradually the responsibilities of party increased. More than 500 members enrolled in the party in this Paragana. On the other side, the Zamindar by using tactics of terror and also by deceiving the people occupied the tenant lands. Party understood this reality and decided to mobilise the people to wage a struggle against the Raja. This situation forced the party to build up a strong party at Paragana level. Tatavarti Venkateswara Rao was elected as Secretary to the party and Uppala Ramaiah, Ghattu Gopala Krishnaiah, Potu Satyanarayana, Kollu

²³ Interview with Chillamcherla Raghunatham.

Chinakotaiah, Kesaboyina Muthaiah, Kukkadapu Rangaiah were the members of the committee. This committee had led the struggle against Zamindar which was started in May 1947. Potluri Sundaram, Member of the Secretariat stayed in Paragana on behalf of District Communist Party and helped Paragana committee by giving advices for struggle and monitored the activities.²⁴

Nallapati Venkatarama Narasaiah tried to destroy Rytu Sangham by establishing counter Sanghams after he was expelled from Communist Party and Rytu Sangham. But his efforts were not succeeded. He also tried to occupy co-operative societies and he failed there also miserably. He instigated the police to file false cases against leaders and activists of Rytu Sangham. In spite of it, party leaders and activists were not surrendered. He realised that there was no use to continue in politics and decided to take up business activity. But, Nallapati Venkatarama Narasaiah again tried to turn the public towards his side by taking the opportunity when the congress party in 1948 arrested and destroyed the property of Rytu Sangham and people of the Paragana. He threatened the people to come forward to his side or otherwise they will be arrested by the police. With this slogan, he thought that he could mobilise people against the communist party. His anti-Communist attitude could not attract the masses and he failed miserably.²⁵

Nallapati Venkatarama Narasaiah called all the rich people to the Munagala and demanded Rs.8,000/- or Rs.10,000/- from every village to purchase arms to fight with communist leaders. Some villagers bargained to reduce the amount and some others took

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Krishna Patrika*, Monthly Magazine, 1948.

the time to pay the amount as he demanded. After the police officials came to know about the demand by the Nallapati they made a tom-tom in the villages not to give donations to him, if they give Nallapati would purchase arms. There would be a possibility that communists would take away the arms from Nallapati and then they might attack the police. Earlier to the tom-tom Nallapati could collect the money from the people. He did not credit this amount to the congress party account and he himself appropriated. District Congress representative, local congressmen confronted with Nallapati to credit the amount to the congress party account. Nallapati said that the money belongs to him and was collected by himself. Meanwhile, with the intervention of police collection of money was stopped.²⁶

Moderators in congress party like B. Pattabhi Seetharamaiah opposed the formation of independent kisan organisations. He betrayed the kisan struggles also. The main reason for split in Andhra Pradesh Rytu Sangham in 1942 was due to political differences. And also, landlords, rich people vested interests had played a major role in the split. Andhra Pradesh Rytu Sangham was a base for kisan and agricultural labourers unity. Prof. Ranga and his followers established Andhra State Kisan Congress in 1943. They were resented to struggles against Zamindar and their main demand was high prices for agricultural products. It showed that the intention of forming this kisan organisation is to protect the interests of rich section among the farmers. This organisation was established to protect the rich farmers.²⁷

²⁶ Venkateswara Rao, T. (1981). "*Munagala Paragana Praja Udyama Charitra*", Kakatiya Publishers, Kodad, p.17.

²⁷ Krishna Rao, Y.V. (1981). "*Andhra Pradeshlo Swathamtraniki Mundu Rytu Poratalu-Rytu Sanghalu*," Visalandhra Publishing House, Vijayawada, pp.33, 34.

Government had declared that elections would be held to the Parliament and assembly in January 1952 as per the Constitution. Congress Government in Central and State started to release the various political prisoners who were kept in jails during 1948 to 1951 by relaxing the oppression. Communist leaders and activists were released from the jails in Andhra Pradesh like in other areas of the country. Pillalamarri Venkateswara Rao, Andhra Communist leader and Member of Madras Assembly toured Munagala Paragana in October 1951. He explained in a public meeting at Munagala how congress Government with police tortured and harassed the party leaders and activists for the last three years. He also explained how the police officials exploited lakhs of rupees from the people. He appealed the people to defeat the congress. Pillalamarri Venkateswara Rao appealed to the people to defeat those persons whoever were responsible for this barbaric actions and teach them a lesson. He visited Thaduvaye, Madhavavaram, Kalukova, Jagannathapuram, Aakupamula, Singavaram, Ramapuram, Nadigudem villages along with local leaders. He enquired about conditions in respective villages and tried to infuse confidence among them. He also explained the party activists about the decision to take part in the elections and stressed the necessity of canvassing among the people. Wherever Pillalamarri Venkateswara Rao had toured, in these villages night patrolling was abolished. Abolition of night patrolling which was continued for the last three years gave an enthusiasm to the people. Paragana party leadership attained self-confidence and encouragement when the people of Paragana villages had convened public meetings, red flags were unfurled and shown a highest respect to the party leadership.²⁸

²⁸ Venkateswara Rao, T. (1981). "*Munagala Paragana Praja Udyama Charitra*", Kakatiya Publishers, Kodad, pp.17, 18.

In the 1952 elections, Adusumalli Suryanarayana Rao contested as Krishik Lok Party candidate. In Munagala, Nallapati Venkatarama Narasaiah presided over the public meeting and N.G. Ranga addressed the meeting. Bandi Tirupataiah stood as congress candidate. In this election, people thought to defeat congress as their prime duty accordingly they have voted to Communist Party candidate Pillalamarri Venkateswara Rao and defeated congress with a majority of four thousand. The spectacular victory in the elections gave a self-confidence to the people. They took Pillalamarri Venkateswara Rao in procession to various villages. He also toured other villages and thanked the people for electing him and assured to do all help and always available to the people to solve their problems. Like this, in Munagala Paragana area, communists won against the congress and Zamindar in this election.²⁹

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 20.