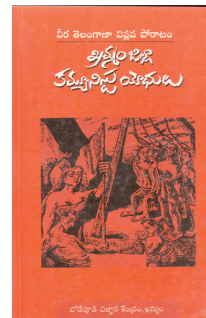


FIELD REPORTS

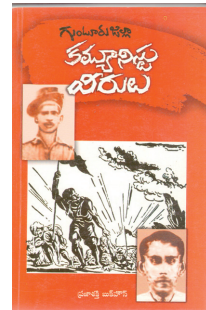
Peasant Struggles in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana: Reports from the Field

Telakapalli Ravi*

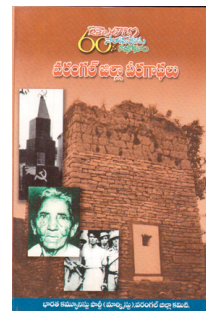
Anandachary, K., Krishna Rao, P. V., and Nageswara Rao, Nunna (2012), *Khammam Zilla Communist Yodhulu* ("The Communist Fighters of Khammam District"), Bodepudi Vignana Kendram, Khammam, pp. 370, Rs 150.



Koteswara Rao, M. V. S., Hari Babu, C. H., and Kiran, Sudha (2013), *Guntur District Communist Veerulu* ("Communist Martyrs of Guntur District"), Prajasakti Book House, Hyderabad, pp. 642, Rs 300.

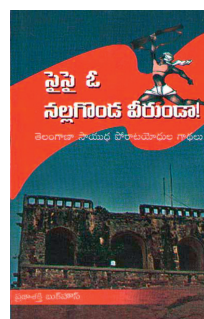


Raghupal, G., and Yadgiri, S. (2006), *Warangal Veera Gathalu* ("Legends of Warangal"), Warangal District Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Warangal, pp. 115, Rs 50.

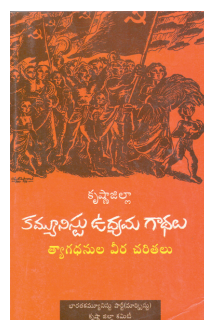


* Media analyst and columnist, and former Editor, *Prajasakti* Daily, ravitelakapalli@yahoo.co.in

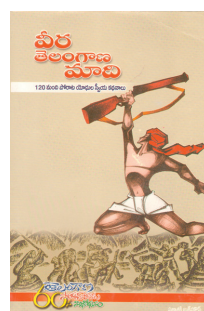
Raghupal, G., and Venkateswarlu, B. (2011), *Sy Sy O Nallagonda Veerudu* (“Be Ready, Nalgonda Hero”), Prajasakti Book House, Hyderabad, pp. 160, Rs 50.



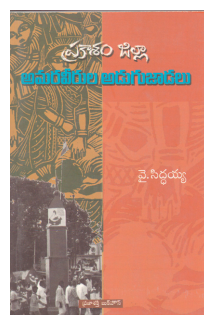
Ramakrishna, U. (2012), *Krishna Jilla Communist Udhya Gathalu: Tyaganula Veeracharitrulu* (“Stories of the Communist Movement and Valiant Sacrifice in Krishna District”), Krishna District Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Vijayawada, pp. 366, Rs 150.



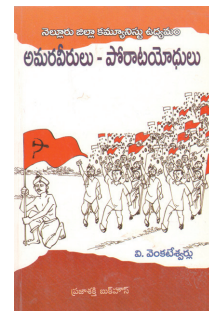
Ravi, Telakapalli, Raghupal, G., Nissar, Sayyad, and Reddy, M. Mahendra (2006), *Veera Telangana Maadi* (“Ours is the Brave Telangana”), Andhra Pradesh State Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Hyderabad, pp. 205, Rs 90.



Siddayya, Y. (2012), *Prakasam Zilla Amara Veerulu* (“The Immortal and Brave Fighters of Prakasam District”), Prajasakti Book House, Hyderabad, pp. 324, Rs 150.



Venkateswarlu, V. (2013), *Amaraveerulu Poratayodhulu* ("Martyrs and Fighters"), Prajasakti Book House, Hyderabad, pp. 280, Rs 150.



In 2006, district committees of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] of undivided Andhra Pradesh (that is, in the present States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) began publication of a unique series of books, histories, and documents of people's struggles in general and of agrarian movements in particular. In scope and method, the books transcend usual definitions of collections of historical documents, and constitute a practical response to the urge for a ground-level history of mass struggles. Notable among such struggles was the Telangana armed struggle, which was in fact a continuation of the anti-zamindari struggles that began in the old Madras State against the backdrop of the Second World War.

Work on the series of books started in 2006, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Telangana armed struggle. The Andhra Pradesh State Committee had formed a team to commemorate the occasion. The objective was to collect material, in various forms, on those who fought in the Telangana struggles. It was also decided to focus on those figures who were not very well-known thus far. An open request for stories was published in the media, and reporters were sent to villages in order to collect stories and photographs. District leaders of the Left were asked to assist the process. In this process, about 200 oral testimonies, biographical accounts, and photographs were collected. On the whole, these books have touched upon at least 600 lives or historical episodes and zones.

Apart from the main editors of each title, about 100 people worked to collect, edit, and prepare the books. The selection of the areas and personalities to be covered was made on the basis of popular legends, reports of that period, police files, and, of course, memories and public perception. The political literature of the time was also of great use in the selection process.

The material dealt with scores of fighters and activists of the time. Some episodes were recounted in interviews directly with participants, and some based on interviews with families and friends of participants. People gave the information gathered, photographs and, other reports of the times that they recorded.

Most of the people involved were social and political workers, writers, teachers, and journalists. Two senior editors and two professors were also involved in the process. The content was vetted, in general, by the respective district teams and committees before publication by Prajasakti Book House.

The unique character of these books lies in the fact that all who participated in and served the cause of mass struggles – whatever their loyalties later – find a place in the volumes. Those who played important roles in the initial stages and left later were also covered. The testimonies of many living veterans of the struggles were included. Places, monuments, and sites connected with major struggles were given prominence. One can reconstruct the course of struggles and movements through the lives and events of the times by means of these books.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The 13 districts of contemporary Andhra Pradesh area can be divided into nine coastal (or Circar) districts and four Rayalaseema districts. These districts and the 10 Telangana districts together constituted undivided Andhra Pradesh.

Historically, Andhra Pradesh had a predominantly peasant economy. While the Circar districts were comparatively better developed economically, socially, and politically, with many infrastructure projects and irrigation facilities, the Rayalaseema districts were less-developed in many respects, characterised by backward agriculture, a lack of big projects, and the predominance of feudal relations and oppression.

The Communist Party in Andhra Pradesh was founded in September 1934 by P. Sundarayya, the legendary Communist leader. He wrote of that period, “the development of the Communist movement in India was a terror for the imperialists and they banned it in 1934, even before its branches could be organised in Andhra Pradesh” (Sundarayya 1972).

The Communists, while working in the Congress organisation, conducted struggles around the demands of agricultural labourers and poor peasants in the villages and the working class in towns, were able to build a significant and independent base among these groups.

As a consequence of the anti-fascist position taken by the Communist Party, the government was forced to lift the ban on the Communist Party in 1942. Communists could now operate legally, and they plunged directly into the battle against colonial forces. They took up day-to-day issues of the people: they conducted agitations, led deputations, organised demonstrations, and held meetings on issues such as the supply of agricultural implements to the peasants, and the repair of tanks, roads, and canals. They fought against the black market and for strict price controls, and against grain-hoarding and corruption. The Communists led a number of struggles of

agricultural workers and also led the “Grow More Food” campaign in the Presidency. In the towns, wide support was mobilised in support of working-class demands, and the Party led some of the workers’ strikes successfully. In many towns, volunteers of the Communist Party were able to successfully unearth grain hoards belonging to black marketeers and to force the Government to distribute grain among the people.

The Communists fought on political, economic, and social fronts, on issues concerning every section of the working people. These included: peasant demands for fair prices for produce and for the supply of agricultural implements and fertilizers; working-class demands for the supply of basic necessities at controlled rates and for an increase in wages; demands by students for the supply of white paper and kerosene at controlled rates, against detentions, and for amenities such as tiffin sheds and toilets in educational institutions; women’s demands, such as the provision of separate sanitary facilities in villages, for maternity and welfare centres, for strict implementation of the anti-child marriages Act, for educational facilities, and for equal rights; and middle-class issues, such as high house rentals and housing scarcity. In short, as Sundarayya wrote, wherever and whenever people were in difficulty, a Communist with a red flag on his shoulder would be there to help and work with them.

Such ceaseless work on people’s issues and close ties with the people through thick and thin enabled the Communists to rally 100,000 people at the All India Kisan Sabha Conference held in Vijayawada (Bezwada) in 1944. The next year, 50,000 people marched to the Provincial Kisan Sabha Conference, held at Tenali in Guntur district.

The new awakening of the peasantry led to anti-zamindari and anti-feudal struggles throughout the region, from Srikakulam in the north to Krishna district in the composite Madras State. Later, the struggles had their influence on Telangana (then called the Nizam’s territories). A prominent leader, C. Rajeswar Rao, was sent on a mission to build contacts with Telangana youth. He stayed in the Reddy hostel in Hyderabad and contacted many who later led mass revolts. The struggles were led by the Andhra Mahasabha, an organisation won over from the control of conservatives.

The books presented here, then, cover both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana regions, and the historical particularities of the struggles in each region.

TELANGANA

The title of the first book in the series is *Veera Telangana Maadi* (“Ours is the Brave Telangana”). In the book, some chapters are first-person interviews and recollections, and some accounts were provided by family members and peers. Most of the fighters were advanced in age, some were in tears when interviewed for their memories. Some were couriers and cooks. Many suffered injuries and were subjected to police repression.

Veera Telangana Maadi describes, for the first time, the lives of many unsung heroes. The stories paint a vivid picture of the valour of the ordinary in the face of the brutal repression unleashed by feudal forces. Most of them were of humble origin. Srinivasa Reddy was a person who went almost up the gallows and escaped at the last moment, thanks to the efforts of progressive lawyers. He was later elected to the Legislative Assembly and is alive today. Interestingly, the book also contains an interview with his lawyer, Ananta Reddy, who was felicitated with him. The movement opposing their death sentences was international: the barrister D. N. Pritt from London travelled to India to defend them.

The book contains an interesting interview with Rajanna, a veteran of many people's struggles. A witness of, and active participant in, the history of Telangana, his birth name was Muddasani Venkatanarasimha Reddy. He was arrested in Mumbai in 1931 during the Salt Satyagraha. He was a follower of the Arya Samaj and worked in movements for social reform. Rajanna then revolted against a feudal landowner (*jagirdar*) who employed bonded labour. As a member of the larger agrarian movement, he participated in big arms raids and in attacks on enemy camps. His house was set ablaze. He worked with Major Jaipal Singh and L. B. Gangadhara Rao in the Krishna Forest (Nallamala) region. After the withdrawal of the Telangana struggle, he settled in Hyderabad and was eventually a worker of the CPI(M). He died at the age of 100, but not before being interviewed for the book.

The police forced Challa Sitaram Reddy to resign from his job as a teacher. He immersed himself in the agrarian movement and became an organiser. His squad led many raids in the deep forests. He was arrested after the withdrawal of the movement, and the police subjected him to severe torture, but got nothing out of him. He was sentenced to death along with four others in a false case and they appealed to the High Court. The sentence was struck down.

The book is edited by this writer, Telakapalli Ravi (President, Sahiti Sravanti), with interviews and reports by G. Raghupal and reporters Sayyad Nissar and M. Mahendra Reddy.

WARANGAL DISTRICT

The next book is on Warangal district. Jangaon, where the struggle actually began, is located in the district. The martyrdom of Doddi Komaraiah in this area is regarded as the starting point of the Telangana armed struggle. People were fighting the encroachment of the land belonging to washerwoman Ayilamma by Deshmukh Visunuru Ramachandra Reddy and his mother. The goons opened fire; Komaraiah, who was in the forefront, lost his life. Thus began the saga of Telangana.

The book captures many related stories. Sundarayya writes of one such incident in his book:

Ganugupati Narayana Reddy, who was the area organiser (*prantiya*), was carrying out the programme of the Party while fighting the enemy at every step. One day, in Solipuram village (Jangaon taluk), he was in the fields distributing the land and solving the problems that had cropped up. That was an open space without any protection and it was mid-day. The enemy was raiding the surrounding area in jeeps and came to that village. They concentrated their attention on Narayana Reddy, who could be easily distinguished from the others. Even though he was unarmed, Narayana Reddy did not surrender to the enemy. He ran in a zig-zag way so as to avoid the line of fire from the jeep. While near the *lambadi tanda* at Kootigadda, the enemy finally caught up with him, drove the jeep straight over him and shot him. Vadla Rajayya, from Akunur village, who was with him at the time, was also shot dead. The enemy took this as a great victory for themselves. The people, in great grief and anger, pledged revenge.

Narayana Reddy was born in a peasant family in Ganugupahad village (Jangaon taluk). He had studied up to the intermediate level, and worked as a headmaster in middle schools in Jangaon and Medak; he had also helped the students' movement. In 1947, he gave up his job during the non-cooperation movement and built the movement in villages. In Khanapuram village, he fought the police and snatched their weapons. He had many victories to his record. He would solve people's problems with great patience, and distributed to the people thousands of acres of land belonging to the landlords and the Government. He had become the beloved leader of the people. (*Ibid.*, pp. 107–8)

The material for the book on Warangal was collected and compiled by G. Raghupal and S. Yadgiri.

NALGONDA DISTRICT

A separate volume is dedicated to Nalgonda, acclaimed as the centre of the Telangana struggle. The title of the volume, *Sai Sai O Nallagonda Veeruda* ("Be Ready, Nalgonda Hero"), is the line of a popular song. The book follows an area-based approach in that it writes about groups of people hailing from or working in particular regions. Where details were not available, the editors attempted to provide brief accounts of the lives of the fighters. The book contains rare interviews, such as one with Javvadi Ramarao. Many Muslim guerrillas of the time appear in the book, debunking communal theorists of various hues.

The information for the book on Nalgonda was collected and compiled by G. Raghupal and B. Venkateswarlu.

KHAMMAM DISTRICT

In 2012, a detailed book was published on Khammam, another major centre of the struggle and a strong base of the Left today. The book, *Khammam Zilla Communist Yodhulu* ("Communist Fighters of Khammam District"), has many stories and

memories of the day. In the process of preparing the book, the editors and writers drew extensively on existing material, which they then, as editors, extended. For instance, the autobiographical notes of C. H. Laxminarasayya, a veteran of the struggle from its inception and later a municipal chairman of Khammam district, provide graphic details of the situation at the time.

The Khammam-Madhira-Kothagudem area bordering Krishna and West Godavari districts, with the Palvancha forest area on the river Godavari as its eastern part, had special economic features, somewhat distinct from the rest of Telangana. It was economically better-developed, with the growth of a rich and middle peasantry and it also had greater social and economic links with the Andhra Pradesh area. The movement here was based more on the demands of the middle peasants and rich peasantry rather than on those of agricultural labourers and poor peasants. Between 1942 and 1945, struggles were conducted on issues such as the grain levy and the supply of agricultural goods (such as iron bands for the wheels on bullock carts).

The area was also a stronghold of the Andhra Mahasabha. Many leaders of the Andhra Mahasabha, such as Chirravuri Lakshmi Narsayya, S. Ramanatham, and others, joined the Communist Party as early as 1940. It was under their leadership that here, in 1945, the Telangana Andhra Mahasabha held its last and biggest session, with over 20,000 people attending the open rally.

When the Nizam refused to join the Indian Union and the State Congress started a civil disobedience (satyagraha) movement, the Communist Party and the Andhra Mahasabha participated actively. They led big demonstrations and broke forest laws. Customs posts were made a special target of attack. The Nizam Government had set up big *Razakar* (militia in support of the Nizam) camps in several towns and key centres such as Khammam, Madhira, Bonakalu, Nalakondapalli, Kallur, and Wyra, from where they raided nearby villages. The Nizam's military squads were posted at every railway station; in addition, a regular military patrol train ran on the railway line from Madhira to Warangal.

After the decision to take up arms, raids were conducted against the Nizam's police and the administrative post at Parital (an enclave in Nandigama taluk, Krishna district). The volume describes such events on the guerrilla front as well as other activities, such as the organisation of libraries for people in the region.

The book also records the life of Seshagiri Rao and Madhava Reddy, of whom Sundarayya writes in his book:

Seshagiri Rao hailed from the Andhra Pradesh area. Even as a student, he was attracted to Communism. He became a full-timer of the Party. Under the instructions of the Party, he went to Kothagudem and started building the mine workers' union. Within a short period, he won the respect and confidence of the workers. He was forced to go

underground during the *Razakars'* terror regime in 1946–7. The police and their agents were always frantically searching for him. He was captured by the Nizam's police, but escaped from their custody while he was being taken to the district headquarters, and rejoined the squads near Dornakall. A few months later, he was travelling from his secret headquarters to Bhadrachallam through the forest paths. On the way, at Tumala Cheruvu, based on information passed on by some betrayer, he and his companions were arrested and shot dead. For a long time, the news of his death was not allowed to reach the public: the enemy was so afraid of his popularity with the mine workers that they expected serious trouble from them.

Madhava Reddy belonged to a small landlord family in Madhira taluk. He was a college student in Hyderabad city. He quit college and joined the Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist Party. He was daring and full of initiative: he made many trips between Khammam area, from the State Party centre near the border, to Hyderabad city, carrying literature and important instructions. He became the political leader of his area.

One day, he went to the Kalakota village to settle some dispute between the agricultural labourers and the rich peasants. A section of the agricultural labourers were under the influence of a missionary school teacher. This missionary school teacher was purchased by the Nizam's police. On that day, this teacher planned that his followers would surround Madhava Reddy and murder him. Madhava Reddy did not suspect any treachery. He knew them well. So he was not on guard. His deputy did not like the way the discussions were going on or the teacher's behaviour, and cautioned Madhava Reddy to be careful. But suddenly, Madhava Reddy's gun was snatched away and he was pounced upon and knifed. The deputy and his two companions ran a few yards and threw a crude bomb at that crowd and were able to escape. (*ibid.*, 1972, p. 109)

Some brief notes are included in this book, so as to help future scholars. Art by Chittaprosad Bhattacharya appears on the cover. As in earlier volumes, the book is also organised by area. Many from old Communist families came forward to share their memories and material with the team, a feature that has made the book worthy and informative.

The book on Khammam was compiled by a team consisting of K. Anandachary, General Secretary of the Sahiti Sravanti and teacher, and P. V. Krishnarao, teacher, aided by Nunna Nageswara Rao.

PLANNED ATTACKS ON ANDHRA MOVEMENT

Sundarayya describes the planned attacks on the Andhra Movement thus:

On January 31, 1948, the Madras Congress Government launched its well-prepared offensive against the militant people's movement in Andhra and its leader, the Communist Party. The assassination of Gandhi, and the consequent clashes between the people and the RSS activists, provided an excuse to carry out its repressive offensive. That night, the police swooped down on and undertook large-scale arrests at several venues, such as the office of the *Prajasakti*, the Communist daily in Bezwada, the Party's City Committee office, the offices of the Krishna District Committee and

the Andhra Provincial Committee of the Party, and the houses of many prominent Communists and their sympathisers. It hoped to bag the whole of the Communist leadership of Andhra. An extended meeting of the Provincial Committee was in session then, just after the Provincial Conference. But the Government failed in its objective, in spite of its sudden swoop.

The reason behind this swoop, the first of its kind in the whole of India, was that the Communist Party in Andhra Pradesh, and the militant mass movement led by it (particularly the powerful people's movement in the Krishna district), was a strong base of support for the Telangana people's struggle for liberation against the Nizam and the *Razakars*. Therefore, when the Government of India entered into the Standstill Agreement with the Nizam, and when the Telangana Communists and the Telangana Andhra Mahasabha repudiated the Agreement and continued to wage the struggle, the Congress became frightened. It was determined to crush and extinguish the Telangana people's struggle, so that the struggle might not become a beacon for the oppressed masses of the rest of India. While on the one hand the Congress was helping the Nizam by supplying arms, on the other hand, it prepared to clean up the rear base of the Telangana people's struggle in Andhra. (*ibid.*, p. 151)

Four books from this area have been published so far.

KRISHNA DISTRICT

This district served as the cradle of the movement in the early decades. The very formation of the party took place here in Vijayawada, and the region saw many historic events and struggles. Considered the nerve-centre of coastal Andhra Pradesh, Krishna was an important area for both Congress and Communist parties. P. Sundarayya used the district (Vijayawada in particular) as his centre of activity for long. He also represented the Gannavaram constituency in the district many times. That particular area endured untold suffering in the period of repression.

The book on Krishna district is titled *Krishna Jilla Communist Udhyama Gathalu: Tyagadanula Veeracharithralu* ("Stories of the Communist Movement and Valiant Fighters of Sacrifice in Krishna District"), and contains over 350 pages and hundreds of photographs of the martyrs. Its introductory chapters cover important historical events, such as the formation of the movement, the historic kisan march from Ichhapuram to Madras in 1937, the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) conference in 1944, and the establishment of Left papers and publications. Krishna district also served as the birthplace of several Indian Progressive Theatre Association (IPTA) art forms. The Praja Natya Mandali, as the Indian Progressive Theatre Association (IPTA) is known there, conducted a month-long school in the district. The book also profiles pioneers of the movement, such as N. Prasada Rao, who served the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) for long. Anti-zamindari struggles in Munagala, Challapalli, and Mylawaram had a great impact. It is this inspiration that eventually spread to Telangana.

The book has detailed narratives of notable struggles by mass groups and of the atrocities committed by police forces. In particular, the activities of Palaniyappan (from the Malabar Police) in his concentration camps are narrated in detail. An incident in which men and women were paraded naked before a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in a village called Yelamaru stirs the conscience even today. The book reconstructs the inglorious event, and carries a photograph of the Gandhi statue. The poem "Tales of Telangana" by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, which mentions the event, also finds a place in the book.

Sundarayya describes the intensification of the people's movement in the Krishna district:

In the Krishna district, the people's movement in support of Telangana intensified. In over 400 villages, the masses of agricultural labourers were preparing for strikes and struggles to win their demands. Their demands were: 30 bags of paddy, eight-hour days, and 30 paid holidays. The peasants in the zamindari tracts refused to pay rent to zamindars and demanded that their rent be scaled down and the zamindari system be abolished. The Madras Government resorted to mass raids, mass beatings, arrests, destruction of properties and utensils, burning and razing down houses, rape, and murder. Congress Seva Dal "volunteers" were pressed into service along with the Special Armed Police.

The usual technique in the raids was for a force of 200-300 policemen to surround a village during the night, to not allow anybody to exit the house (even if to answer the call of nature), and to gather men and women of the village in a cattle-shed and beat them, while other policemen entered the houses and began looting, breaking the furniture and utensils, tearing to pieces sarees, shirts, and dhoties, and mixing dal, rice, and pickles with kerosene and urine. They burnt and razed to the ground many houses and prevented the cultivation of land belonging to Communist workers and their relatives. Agricultural labour hamlets were particular targets in the raids. Such raids continued for three full months from May to July. Though the main concentration was in the Krishna district, raids took place in Guntur and Godavari districts, and even in Kurnool district, as they all border Telangana. In the agricultural labour hamlets, the workers were beaten and forced to shout that 15 bags of paddy per year, or 8 annas (50 paise) per day would be enough and that they would give up their demand for 30 bags of paddy and Rs 1.50 per day. (*Ibid.*, p. 152)

Many dedicated leaders of the movement were lost in the attacks.

Chintapalli Paparao, the Krishna district Secretariat member of the Communist Party, was arrested in Surampalli village (Gannavaram taluk) in October 1949 by Palaniappan, the Special DSP in Krishna. Palaniappan demanded that Paparao resign from the Party. Paparao spat on him and shouted, "Communist Party Zindabad." Palaniappan shot off his tied arms and once again demanded his resignation. Paparao shouted back, "You cur, had I got information of your raid just half an hour before, I would have seen your blood." He was shot in the thigh and he fell down, but he refused for the third time to give up his Party. He died with the victory cry, "Communist Party Zindabad" on his lips

when the third shot pierced his heart. Thousands of people gathered at Gannavaram hospital in spite of the police terror to have a last glimpse of their beloved leader. Nobody believed the Congress communique that the police officer shot him dead as he was about to stab the officer. (*ibid.*, p. 165)

The repression continued even in jails.

In Cuddalore jail, where Andhra detenus were kept, the police opened fire on the detenus, killing four comrades, including Comrade Anumalapudi Seetharamarao, the Krishna district kisan leader. He was shot at point-blank range by the jail-constables after he fell flat, with the gun held directly above him. The reason for this repeated firing on the Cuddalore detenus was that they demanded, among other things, no segregation from the rest of the detenus; interviews with their wives and close relatives; allowances for their families; that all kisan and worker prisoners be treated as political prisoners and be given special class improved facilities and betterment of conditions of the ordinary convicts; and transfer to their own district jails. They demanded that they be tried or released.

Apart from the four killed, nearly a hundred received gunshot injuries or severe injuries from lathi blows. In Salem jail, the police opened fire, killed 22 Communist prisoners, all of them belonging to Kerala, and injured more than a hundred belonging to all regions of the Madras State. (*Ibid.*, p. 157)

Many comrades, especially women who gave shelter to the leaders in those testing times, recollect their experiences in the book. On the whole, this book is a comprehensive account of the period.

The book on Krishna district was collected and compiled by U. Ramakrishna, who is a journalist with *Prajasakti*.

PRAKASAM DISTRICT

Prakasam Zilla Amara Veerulu ("Immortal and Brave Fighters of Prakasam District") is another book in the series. This book is 320 pages long and narrates the life-stories of various personalities who were devoted to the Left and agrarian movements. This book deals with several aspects of the Communist movement in the coastal belt of the State. The book on Prakasam district, formed from parts of Guntur, Kurnool, and Nellore, is divided into four parts. The first part is dedicated to profiles of martyrs of the struggle in 1946–51. The second part covers the events of the freedom struggle and the establishment of the Communist movement. The section covers several historic events, such as the Pedanandipadu movement against the payment of tax and the Venkatagiri anti-zamindari struggle. It also narrates the struggle that led to the construction of the Nagarjunasagar Dam. The Kottapatnam political school, the second in the region, was also held in this district. Accounts of these activities, along with the personal accounts of those who participated in them and reports of that period, are covered in the section.

The third part comprises life-sketches of people who died after 1970, including some Naxalite leaders killed in encounters. The fourth part provides a detailed picture of scores of activists, social workers, and professionals who spent their whole life in the cause of the movement. On reading the book, the reader is able to gauge of the spread of progressive ideas in the period. The people covered include people's representatives, ideologues, artists, women fighters, and, of course, peasants and agricultural workers. A specific feature of the area were large-scale social movements.

The book on Prakasam district was compiled by Y. Siddayya, former secretary of the Sundarayya Vignana Kendram.

GUNTUR DISTRICT

The book on Guntur district is the biggest of the project. Titled *Guntur District Communist Veerulu* ("Communist Martyrs of Guntur District"), the book is more than 600 hundred pages long. The book is a comprehensive and complete account of the growth of the movement in the district, which was famous for many important leaders, including M. Basavapunnayya, M. Hanumantha Rao, L. B. Gangadhara Rao, and K. Satyanarayana. In fact, the district is known as the ideological bastion of the Left; people joke that all the Left groups in the world are represented in the district even now. Apart from politics, people's art also flourished in the region. The district gave the Left movement a popular form of oral storytelling (*burra katha*) pioneered by the legendary Nazar.

In the course of the freedom movement, many agrarian struggles, including movements against the payment of taxes, took place in Guntur district. A notable and inspiring struggle was led by Palanati Hanumantu against the Pullari Tax (that is, a tax on grazing animals). Many interesting accounts of such struggles appear in the book. The book describes the lives of about 200 comrades of the period. It is divided into three parts, based on the nature of the narratives. The relatives and comrades of martyrs helped the authors a great deal in collecting material for the book. The narratives give us accounts of the region and cover personal life sketches as well.

The first union of agricultural workers in the State was established by P. Sundarayya in his native village. The next unit of the agricultural workers' union was established in Guntur district. The first State secretary of the Communist Party, P. Narasimha Murthy, was also from the district. N. Prasada Rao, for long the General Secretary of the All-India Kisan Sabha, functional from Guntur district (he was born in Krishna district) cadre played a very active role in the Telangana armed struggle and there were villages where many youth were shot dead. The struggle for fallow and waste (*banjar*) lands and against the drainage cess had a big impact on peasants in the district. The book also has very useful and well-captioned photographs.

The district has also been witness to fierce repression by state power. During the period of the Telangana people's struggle, Kasturi Kutumba Rao, Secretary, Andhra Handloom Weavers' Association, Chivukula Sesha Sastry, a Bapatla town party leader, M. Lakshminarayana, District Teachers' Federation Secretary, Danda Narayanaswamy, a Narsaraopet taluk Party leader, Dasari Subbayya, Rapalle taluk leader, Mallikarjuna Sarma, Guntur district agricultural labour leader, Madala Kotayya and Narasayya of Ongole taluk were all arrested and were shot dead in cold blood.

Sundarayya describes an incident from the town of Bapatla in his book.

One of the death-defying stories comes from the town of Bapatla. Here, there was an underground den of the Tenali Area Committee. Kantamaneni Venkataratnam, the Area Committee member, was staying there with Comrade Moturi Venkataratnam's family, his wife and her two-year-old baby. The police surrounded the house. Comrade Venkataratnam refused to surrender. He wanted to fight the marauding police and teach them a lesson. He asked the Moturi family to go out by the back door while he covered the police with fire. They refused to leave their leader alone. A gun battle ensued. The police inspector fell down (he died later). The police could not overcome the resistance, so they set the house to fire with petrol. Comrade Kantamaneni Venkataratnam and his den-keeper, Moturi Venkataratnam and his two year-old baby in the hands of the mother, died of gunshots.

Janakiamma, of Ramapuram village in Palnad taluk, because she had been giving shelter to the Telangana guerrillas, was molested, tortured, and shot dead. Besides her, all other cadre of the area were shot dead. The excuse was that they aided the Telangana guerrillas who had raided the Atchampeta police station and killed notorious police agents like the village karanam of Ramapuram. (p. 167)

These are but a few examples of the heroic fighters in the cause of the people.

The book on Guntur was collected and compiled by a team consisting of Haribabu, senior executive of Nagarjuna University, Professor M. V. S. Koteswara Rao of Nagarjuna University, and Sudha Kiran, a journalist with *Prajasakti*.

NELLORE DISTRICT

The book on Nellore is another important book in the series. Nellore district is an important centre of the Communist movement in Andhra Pradesh. Puchalapalli Sundarayya, pioneer of the movement in south India, was from Alaganipadu in this district. He started the first agricultural workers' union in India in his village back in the 1930s. The book rightly begins with a piece on the political and historical background of the district, drawn from various sources, including the writings of P. Sundarayya.

The press workers' union, being directly influenced by the Communist movement in Madras, began earlier in this district than in other Telugu-speaking areas.

The struggle against the zamindari system in Venkatagiri in the district made a big impact. Some of those who participated in it later became Communists. According to the Prakasam report, 40 per cent of land in coastal Andhra Pradesh was under the zamindari system. The tax system was called *peshkash*. The peasants of the district suffered greatly during World War II, when taxes were raised four times. Braving repressive forces, the first Andhra Pradesh anti-zamindari conference was held here in September 1931.

The book narrates the history of the movement in the region in short, and then details the social composition of the rural areas, basing its discussion on Sundarayya's own account of his birthplace. The first chapter describes the life of Sundarayya in his own words, in an interview with Kambhampati Satyanarayana, his contemporary in the movement. The book contains life sketches of many leaders in the district. It also has an interesting chapter on the Praja Vaidyasala established by Dr. Ramachandra Reddy, the younger brother of Sundarayya and a pioneer in the people's health movement. The hospital that he established in Nellore, the People's Polyclinic, is one of its kind in the State and India, continues to run successfully even in the era of the corporatisation of the health sector.

Another interesting aspect of the movement in the district is the heroic struggle of landless workers in 1979, led by the agricultural workers' union. The struggle led to the large-scale occupation of surplus lands. In the course of this struggle, the police opened fire at the workers, killing one agricultural worker, Tiripalu, and maiming others. Many interesting features of the history of struggle in the region are presented in the book.

Material for the book on Nellore was collected and compiled by V. Venkateswarlu, journalist and former principal, Prajasakti Journalism College.

CONCLUDING NOTES

These books and the efforts associated with the collection of material for the books have created a new interest in recording the history of people's struggles and the parts played by individual participants in these struggles. Many members of the families of such participants, along with other well-wishers of the project treated the project as a way to pay respect to leaders, cadres, and martyrs of days gone by, and to participants in historical people's movements who are still alive. Relevant photographs and publications from the past are brought to light at various places and different platforms. Small teams or groups of researchers have emerged in various districts. It is now considered a big lapse for a district not to have published a book on participants in agrarian and Left struggles.

Individual leaders of the peasant and people's movement have also begun to write down their memories. This writer's father, a senior kisan leader in Kurnool district,

was the first to publish a memoir, setting a trend that was followed in various districts. Drawing on information gained from these books, historic days and occasions are now observed by people in different parts of the two States.

The division of the State has further created an interest in recording the histories of each region, spurred on by a new curiosity from among the young. A new kind of confidence has emerged among interested people in different districts: a confidence in being able to write down their own histories – or at least provide the material for people’s histories.

As the project progressed, the quantity and quality of the material made available to the writers and researchers improved. The organisers of the project now plan to publish two volumes covering Rayalaseema and North Telangana areas, which have not yet been covered by the series. A similar attempt is expected from north coastal Andhra Pradesh in the future.

Thus, in the process of recording the histories of movements, the books also have become beacons for the future, which, it could be argued, is the very purpose of the science of history.

REFERENCES

Sundarayya, P. (1972), *Telangana People’s Struggles and its Lessons*, National Book Agency, Kolkata.

GLOSSARY

<i>banjar</i>	wasteland
<i>burra katha</i>	oral storytelling form
<i>jagirdar</i>	a feudal owner of land
<i>peshkash</i>	a customary tax consisting of gifts to officials
<i>razakar</i>	militia in support of the Nizam of Hyderabad