

# TRIBALS : WORST AMONG THE EXPLOITED

The growing agrarian discontent revealed in sporadic outbursts - leading even to resistance by arms to counter the growing exploitation and repression of the landlords - in many parts of the country, has within it first and foremost the Adivasis.

There are 30 million Adivasis in India, as many as 95 per cent of them living in rural India, engaged as agricultural labourers, inferior tenants, and small peasants.

Remnants of primordial slavery, known variously as Sagri, Jothi, Hali, Vetti, etc., exist in various parts of the country especially in the predominantly in Adivasi areas.

Amongst the agricultural labourers, which is the most exploited class in India, the tribal labourers are still worse off.

According to the 1960-61 Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the percentage of landless Adivasis has grown from 50 in 1950 to 57 in 1956-57.

Experience shows that the same trend has continued even in the next decade. Even according to the Dhebar Commission Report, in respect of indebtedness, land alienation, forced labour, and illiteracy, the tribals continue to be the worst exploited. In Tripura, for example, a state with a majority tribal population, they have been reduced to the position of minority through the process of land-grabbing by non-tribals with the connivance of, and assistance given by, the ruling party.

Volume II, No. 2, of the Bulletin published by the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal points out that "large amounts of land have been alienated in the districts of Malda, West Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Birbhum, 24 Paraganas, Bankura, Purulia, Hoogly, Burdwan and Midnapore during the period 1956-1960" and that "alienation took place mainly from tribals to non-tribals".

It should be remembered that these transfers took place despite the fifth schedule of the constitution which protects the

land of the Adivasis.

A large percentage of them are subject to feudal exploitation and slavery - such as the Mutadari system as in Andhra Pradesh. The Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in his 16th report (1966-67) refers to the survey conducted in the Chintapalle taluk of Visakhapatnam district. This entire taluk is a 'scheduled area' in terms of the fifth schedule of the constitution. In this area, the old Mutadari system continued long after 'independence' and after so-called enactments of land reform policies. According to this Mutadari system, the landlord, i.e., the Mutadar enjoys rent free estates, but himself can collect exorbitant rents.

The Commissioner states : "In some muthas, the Mutadar charged rents worked on the basis of each plough used by the ryot for cultivation. While in the others the rents were charged on the basis of quantum of seeds sown". Mutadars have been progressively enhancing the rents in some cases. "Vetti (i.e. unpaid labour for Mutadar's personal service) and Mamools (i.e., an illegal exaction like 'Salami') have not yet disappeared completely".

The survey also revealed startling cases of land-alienation by deceiving the law : "It is irregular in the Agency area for a Mutadar to be a party to the transfer of the land to plainsmen but with the assistance of Voora Munsiff (through whom Mutadars collect rent) land appeared to have changed hands".

It is not only the landlords who have been squeezing the tribals. Even the government has been evicting them for various reasons. We had noted how, in Lakhimpur and other forest areas, in U.P., the government scheme of land colonisation has helped landlords, high officials, and industrialists, to occupy thousands of acres of land to 'develop' that hilly area with the help of government finance. The following incident reported in Blitz in its issue dated April 4, 1970, reveals the fate of Adivasis and other agricultural labour in the hands of the government which talks of land reforms day and night but consistently carries on anti-peoples' policies in action.

Blitz, on April, 4 1970, reports that : "The recent decision of the Maharashtra Government to evict over 43,000 Adivasis from so-called 'forest lands', which they have brought under cultivation caused furore in state legislative Assembly last week". Vinayak

Bhave, the author continues : "In Feth taluka of Nasik district, the Forest Department has so far collected over Rs. 35 lakhs from Adivasi landless for 'encroaching' on forest lands and cultivating them".

"This amount," he writes, "is bigger than that spent by the government on the development and uplift of the Adivasis in that taluka". These incidents only once again highlight the growing gravity of the problem of rural landless in Maharashtra. Agricultural labour constitute 24 per cent of the total population and 34 per cent of the rural population in Maharashtra. In eight districts of Vidarbha region, and in five districts of Marathwada, landless labourers constitute 47 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively, of the agriculturists.

According to D. R. Gadgil, Vice Chairman of the Government of India's Planning Commission and an eminent economist, the average per capita income of an agricultural labourer is only 28 percent of the per capita income (Rs. 392) of the Maharashtra people as a whole. This means that an agricultural labourer in the state lives on a little more than 30 paise a day.

As a majority of agricultural labour belong to the so-called untouchable castes and backward tribes, along with economic exploitation, they are subjected to social oppression by rich landlords, who belong to higher castes.

"If they attempt to assert themselves economically and socially, they must be prepared to face ostracism, abuse, threats and assaults as well as police repression."

Apart from these labourers, 29 per cent of all the peasant proprietors in the state are so poor that they have to work for others as wage labourers apart from cultivating their own small plots of land.

"As though this is not enough, the government's policies have led to the expropriation of a large number of poor peasants and tenants, thus swelling the ranks of the landless."

Big land-owners, who constitute only 7 per cent of the cultivators' households, own 40 per cent of the agricultural land in the state.

As a result of all this, the number of landless rural labourers

in Maharashtra is growing at an alarming rate. "While the total population of Maharashtra increased by 23.6 per cent since 1961, the number of agricultural workers increased by 93 per cent during the same period."

"The discontent already growing among them might lead to an explosive situation" concludes Bhawe.

In an editorial, Indian Express of July 31, 1968, referring to "cases of mob violence at many places in the rural areas", warns the government that "an explosive situation might develop if the grievances of the tribal are not promptly looked into".

The editorial goes on to add that "the main grievance of the tribals relate to land. As Mr. S. M. Joshi told the Lok Sabha the Adivasis are being thrown out of their lands in defiance of the law. Most of the trouble comes from the money-lenders who have been used so far to take over large areas of land from the gullible Adivasis in repayment of small loans."

Only recently, after the uprising of the Srikakulam tribals, laws have been enacted to abolish the Mutadari system. Of course, it does not mean that it has been implemented.

An upsurge of the tribals is already the order of the day, and they are already on the march; complete abolition of feudal land relations is the most urgent demand of the Adivasis. The demand can be realised only by organising them to take the law into their own hands and implement it by the united force of the movement.

The Government makes the dubious plea that it is spending hundreds of millions of rupees for the welfare of the tribals. By establishing separate panchayats and panchayat samithies for the tribals and separate constituencies for the Assemblies, the ruling class maintains that tribal welfare is its special interest. Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are being shown certain special favour by the ruling class so as to create by these methods a section of 'labour aristocracy' among them, who could reap certain benefits and rise above the level of the exploited classes, so that through their hold on the backward castes the ruling class can continue to exploit them more fully. The present-day labours of this class have learnt it as an art to dupe the agricultural labourers by these methods. A few jobs here and there, certain number of panchayat presidents, and members of the Assembly,

creates the conditions for caste and political corruption to divide the ranks of the exploited classes, and to make use of this growing 'labour aristocracy' for certain necessary pulls. It helps to create "status differences within the lower caste to play the role of the middle-man in the interests of wealthy and powerful high castes. As a writer in Economic and Political Weekly (January 8, 1972), put it :

*To be sure the reservation of constituencies serves to focus public attention on a small number of scheduled caste candidates at every election and along with the other measures intended to benefit the Harijans, this too contributes to status differentiation within the lower castes .... other resources tend simultaneously to flow in the same direction : The man of political prominence may be nominated to the District Welfare Committee, charged with allocating land and other resources to Harijans, and the Committee members take good care of their close kinsmen. Further, his children are rather more likely to go through school and college and so avail of scholarships there and preferential treatment to government jobs later. Hence the so-called special preference given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes creates a measure of wealth and power (for a few, but) the large majority (of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) as well as the other poor continue to find the political system unresponsive to their wants ..... None among them are ever bothered about the larger institutional mechanisms of economic and social set up which underlie and renew the current inequalities nor are they prepared, due to their close contacts established in the process with the higher classes, to address themselves to the tasks of changing the totality of exploiting system to the one that would generate effective social, economic and political equality.*

This is exactly the purpose of the special schemes and institutions set up by the Government in relation to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and to expect some good in the larger sense is a myth.

'Welfare' societies are a speciality of this country. Harijan welfare, tribal welfare, women's welfare leading up to the animal

welfare in this god-fearing, acquisitive, society are numerous. Benevolence is the sacred path to **Moksha**. One cannot show benevolence unless there are poor and beggars. Therefore, to sustain the poor from extinction is a religious duty. And this duty is best performed in our society to the best of its ability through welfare schemes. And one such scheme was the tribal welfare scheme. A description of its functioning was provided by Blitz in its issue of July 31, 1971. This is an interesting and typical instance of welfare, enacted with fanfare by the state governments in India. This is a disgusting tale of corruption in the name of the tribal welfare. No conspiracy case has even been instituted against any of such crimes in our country.

Madhya Pradesh Tribal Co-operative Development Corporation, established in March 1960, "to achieve the urgent social purpose of saving from exploitation of the tribals who are over 70 lakhs in number (22 per cent of the population) of the state" according to Blitz of July 30, 1971, has come to grief after having squandered about Rs. 3 crores.

The corporation was to ensure :

- (1) Proper supply of commodities of daily use at fair prices to the tribals ;
- (2) and reasonable price for the forest produce collected by the tribals.

"In the guise of supplying things of daily use to the tribals at fair prices, the corporation purchases everything under the sun except the commodities actually needed by the tribals every day."

For example, the corporation purchased **rakhis** worth some akhs, 60,000 terelyne suiting pieces costing more than Rs. 6 akhs, terelyne shirting costing Rs. 3.45 lakhs, and another half million rupees were squandered on the purchase of lipsticks, powders, chocolates, costly crockery, and high quality tea coffee.

Mr. Narohna, Blitz reports, who was appointed to investigate into the working of the corporation has calculated the loss incurred by the corporation to be Rs. 89 lakhs.

To achieve this brilliant result, the corporation spent lavishly on the establishment :

	Rs.
1965-66 .....	14,15,630
1966-67 .....	23,90,232
1967-68 .....	29,91,263
1968-69 .....	27,92,566
1969-70 .....	21,63,660

This reminds me of a description of the government of England by the famous writer Thomas Paine in his book "Rights of Man", for the publication of which he was charged with sedition in 1792, as the author and publisher of the book, and was sentenced to outlawry.

"That the Government of England" wrote Paine, "is as great if not the greatest perfection of fraud and corruption that ever took place since governments began, is what you cannot be a stranger to, unless the constant habit of seeing it has blinded your sense".

Do not such objective conditions lead to an explosive situation? If they do who is responsible for it?

It is with this general back ground that one must look at the growing discontent bursting into revolt under continuous provocation and high-handed violent activities of the landlords in connivance and support of the police. Such bursting of discontent, be it in Naxalbari, Srikakulam, Gopiballapur, East Godavari, Mushahari, Lakhimpur, Khammam, Warangal - everywhere the same pattern of local people dislodged from lands, illegal exactions of **mamools**, forced free labour, unimaginably low wages, extremely high interest rates, are fleecing the people to their bones. The Communists in all these areas are doing the legitimate duty of organising these girijans to fight for better wages and for land, and to abolish feudal exactions like free labour, low wages, false measures, and **mamools**. In the process, it is the landlords' violence that they have to encounter first. The support always, in every area, of the police and the government is on the side of the landlords. Such has been the story everywhere.

To take the Srikakulam girijan peasant revolt as an instance for a short review would reveal truly who are the actual conspirators - the revolutionaries who stood by the people on the degeneratee

landlords and their representatives in the government. The short note below, mainly in the form of extracts from daily Press, which are generally anti-communist, should clearly prove that the girijan peasants had no other way except to counter landlord and government counter-revolutionary violence with the revolutionary violence of their own. It will clearly point out how the landlords in their every day relations with the people behaved mercilessly and illegally. And yet, every one of their illegal acts were condoned by the landlord government. It will clearly reveal how the landlords were never bothered with the constitutional rights and privileges of the girijans incorporated in the fifth schedule of the constitution, since the landlords know that any constitutional privilege to any section of the people, which goes counter to the interests of the landlords, is a fake. And they proved it in action. The landlords knew that power is held only by those who wield the gun and used it mercilessly. Thereby they taught this historic truth to the innocent girijans. The government, by standing always on the side of the landlords and acting always at the behest of the landlords, taught them the lesson that this government will not only come to its rescue against landlord goondaism but will itself adopt worse methods in the interests of the landlords.

More than what the Communists taught them, experience was the best teacher. Revolutionaries only pinpointed these multi-faceted truths on the basis of the multi-faceted experience of the girijans themselves.

The following recitation of facts, as was reported in the 'respectable' Press, will reveal the truth that "the times of superstition which attributed revolutions to the ill will of a few agitators has long passed away. Every one knows now-a-days that, wherever there are revolutionary convulsions, there must be some social want in the background, which is prevented by outworn institutions, from satisfying itself." (Marx: "Revolution and Counter-Revolution").

### Revolt in Srikakulam

Times of India, writing a review on the girijan revolt in Srikakulam, pertinently begins: "Rendered desperate by their misery, and the harassment of avaricious plainsman, the girijans of Srikakulam have turned to violence to avenge their wrongs." (January 4, 1970).

Its history of struggle, which has blazed the truth that taking up arms is the only way out for the downtrodden, uprooted, peasantry in our country, is essential at the moment.

### Conditions of the People

(1) "The economic life of the people is alarmingly miserable. While some of the tribals live on shift cultivation (**podu**), some others depend on the sale of forest produce such as tamarind, which they barter at weekly mandies or sell them to their regular customers. It is said that a maund of tamarind is exchanged for a kilo of salt or a small bottle of sweet oil."

Agricultural labour is the main occupation of the girijans. "The daily wages of these men range from 20 to 40 paise. The normal food of these people is gruel made out of tamarind seed powder."

*It is said that money-lenders from the plains pay Rs. 10 to girijans and obtain a promote for Rs. 100 or more, and sometimes even signed blank papers. Whatever amount is paid is credited as interest. They are shown huge debts against them and are asked to part with the piece of land they possess. If not, they are evicted from their lands with the connivance of the local police and revenue officials.*

*In a bid to prevent the plains people from grabbing the lands of girijans in the Agency area, a legislation was passed as early as 1917. This law warrants prior approval of the district Collector for land alienations. But, unfortunately, all these years it was honoured more in the breach. The administrative machinery does not exist as far as land transaction in the tribal areas. Benefits of independence for the tribals have been almost nil.*

*Though crores of rupees are being sunk in the name of tribal welfare under the five year plans - nobody knows where all this money has gone ..... The governments have been oblivious to their responsibilities towards these virile colourful sections of the people until they got Naxalite jolt.*

*As a result, the girijans know the government*

*only in the form of forest guards, who obstruct them from carrying firewood from the forests, unless of course their palms are greased.*

*The tribal finance and development corporation could not play its role to help the girijans, inhibited as it is by its own inept and even corrupt staff.*

(Daily News : March 14, 1970).

(2) The Times of India in its report on 'Revolt in Srikakulam' dated January 4, 1970, speaks of :

"The long - standing grievances of the tribals, called girijans, who have been ruthlessly exploited for decades by merchants and the money lenders from the plains ; "forest guards, who behave with them like little Hitlers"; "plains' merchant who buys the forest produce for a song and in times of needs lends them money at exorbitant rate of interest" resulting "invariably", in girijans "losing his land to the money lender"; "vast stretches of land passing into the hands of the plainsman who went and settled in the Agency areas"; "the plight of tribals who are being paid 25 paise a day by land owners for working in the fields"; "merchants fleecing the illiterate, unsophisticated tribals", who were paid "a pittance for the forest produce brought by the girijans and make fabulous profits".

The reports in the Press, as early as in 1968, spoke of the unexampled wretchedness of the life of the girijans, unending exploitation of these tribal people, unhindered by any law of the country sowing seeds of discontent, and finally provoking them to revolt due to the brutal behaviour of the government and open declaration of war by the landlords.

(3) The special correspondent of the Hindu reports the "tension in the area" which "has been mounting after an incident in the Levidi village .... where two persons were shot dead in October 1967 by the landlords. The following facts regarding some issues of the area were published by it in February 1968 :

"Basically the present tension springs from an agrarian problem ..... Several plains people settled down at the foot of the mountains as money lenders. The hill lands passed to them slowly, either because the girijans could not redeem the mortgages or because the landlords themselves exploited the illiteracy of the

girijans and now show documents in their favour.

Hindu, again, reporting in March 1968 says : "The girijan unrest in the Agency villages of Srikakulam district, that came to the surface in July last year has brought into focus the failure of the government and voluntary agencies programme dealing with the tribal welfare".

"The last census shows that there were 12 lakhs girijans in Andhra Pradesh and that 97 per cent of them were illiterate. In Srikakulam district, the predominant community is Savara tribe and the census showed that out of 68,000 Savaras in the state only 3 had a qualification equal to matriculation and only 103 had schooling upto the primary state level. Officials say the picture has remained much the same today."

"It is a general feeling now among the officials and the public in the district that it would be better if at least a beginning is made to solve the many problems the girijans have been facing all these years. The problems are mainly agrarian, such as land ownership and higher wages; but there are other problems such as bringing to the girijan communities ideas regarding sanitation, better food habits, elementary education, etc. These problems were never seriously considered before, in spite of several measures aimed at girijan uplift."

(4) Andhra Patrika of March 25, 1968, in a special report on "Problems of Srikakulam Agency" says :

"It is the failure of the government to implement Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation Act, 1959, that has been responsible for the present tension in the area".

"The people from the plain areas have illegally occupied the land which has been in the hands of girijans for hundreds of years."

"At present in Srikakulam Agency area, if hundred acres are owned by the peasants coming from the plains, the girijans own only one acre".

There are 80,000 girijans in Srikakulam Agency area. The landlords who got 'free labour' from these girijans prepared the ground for the communist propaganda. "In this area, landlords who came from the plains and grew affluent, have influence in the

government. The officials played to the tune of the landlords ..... The more the landlords from the plains and the police use force to control the present situation, the more the girijans will get provoked ..... Therefore, unless the land occupied by the people of the plains is surveyed and **Pattas** granted to the girijans, the efforts to establish a girijan raj is inevitable".

(5) Link, March 17, 1968, says : "Exploited for generations, the tribal population of Parvathipuram, in the northern district of Srikakulam bordering Orissa is now feeling the urge to free itself from economic and social exploitation".

"Parvathipuram Agency is reputed for its abundant forest wealth. Rich landlords from the plains and middle-men have traditionally been living on the toil of the girijans. A few years ago, Left Communists organised them and launched movements against landlord exploitation, but precious little was done by the administration to ameliorate their conditions, despite the ambitious welfare scheme."

"Frustrated and angered by the collusion between petty revenue and forest officials and the landlords, the tribals have taken to struggle. Gone are the days when the girijan used to run away at the sight of the plains people". "During the last 3 months there have been over hundred incidents, big and small. For months prohibitory orders under section 144 were enforced in scores of villages. On two occasions the police had to open fire."

(6) Times of India, March 22, 1968, says :

"In recent years the plains people have moved into a part of the tract."

"They have become land-owners, moneylenders and petty shopkeepers. This has hardened the tribes men's suspicion of the plains people. The latter now employ the tribals as farm labour on low or minimal wages. They lend money at usurious rates of interest and employ harsh methods to claim the ever-mounting interests".

"The agrarian discontent which the Left Communists are now charged with fomenting has, therefore, a real base. So far the police has found it easier to side with the plains people in their frequent quarrels".

(7) Statesman, on '*Girijan Revolt*' published two special articles from a special correspondent, V. M. Nair, on April 11 and 12, 1968, in which it is said :

"Plains men who moved into the tribal reserve as merchants, moneylenders and contractors exploited this basic weakness (of addiction to drink), lent them money, and gradually bought out their lands, often for a pittance. Today practically all the fertile wet lands in the reserve area are owned by these self-styled landlords whose average holding ranges from 5 to 90 acres."

"Long after independence these petty landlords continued to exploit the girijans, paying them no more than 4 annas for a day's work in the fields. Communists moved into the area and began organising the tribals. The landlords, mainly claiming to be Congress men and supporters of the ruling party, retaliated, often through unfair means, to smoothen the growing restiveness among their vassals".

"Local officials were influenced into inaction. Two prosperous ryots of Gumma Lakshmi Puram, I was told, even saw to it, that a tribal labour co-operative was not awarded any contract by the Block Development Officer although there was a specific government direction to encourage such co-operatives."

"No political party apart from the Communists made any effort to redress the girijans' grievances against the landlords - On the contrary, they (other political parties) relied and continue to rely heavily on the police to keep the tribals in check".

### Communists and the Girijans

"By 1955, the Communists moved into the area and began organising the tribals .... The Marxist Communists in the Girijan belt have clearly won their point by forcing an increase in the wages of tribal labour and creating a feeling among the landless that they can get land."

"This has emboldened the Communist leadership in the area to give a call for the expulsion of all the plainsmen from the region and the restoration of all lands to the tribals. The Communist argument is that these lands were 'purchased' from the girijans in the first place by violating the Land Regulation Act of 1917 which prohibits the transfer of land to outsiders except through an auction or in pursuance of a court decree."

"At least a partial acceptance of this argument is implicit in the state government's decision to appoint a Special Officer to investigate all complaints of wrongful acquisitions of land."

"The demand for a blanket ban on plainmen has become the pretext for an equally extreme and untenable reaction by the landlords whose previous record has been unsatisfactory. Having organised themselves into a Ryots Sangam, the landlords are now resisting even the legitimate and long overdue process of restoring to the tribals the land which they have been deprived of illegally and fraudulently."

Over the past 8 years, the Communists have "Successfully organised the girijan agricultural workers into a militant enough body to be able to extract a substantial increase in their daily wages, and otherwise demonstrated how systematic and sustained propaganda can transform even the most harmless aboriginals into a dangerously rebellious group."

"No political party apart from the Communists made any effort to redress the girijans grievances against the land lords."

"The Congressmen of the area were largely identified with the land lord class ..... They relied and continue to rely heavily on the police to keep the tribals in check".

"In sharp contrast, the Marxists moved into the mountains, lived with the tribals, and identified themselves with their aspirations and hopes. Top Communist leaders toured the area exhorting the girijans to rise against the exploiting landlords."

"An association called Srikakulam Girijan Association was formed, ..... They succeeded in bettering the lot of the lowly and exploited tribe. Today girijan labourers in Elwinpet and Parvathipuram get the highest wages in the area, ranging from Rs. 3 to 8 in paddy for a day's work.

**LANDLORDS' HIGH HANDEDNESS :** "Indeed it is possible to argue that the unthinking militancy of the landlords not only triggered off the tribal unrest but also provided a justification for the Communist tactics."

"Although the landlords' high handedness are many, it was an incident on October 31, last year, that sparked off the revolt ..... On that day, a group of slogan-shouting girijans on its way to a

Marxist meeting were beaten up by landlords. When the girijans fought back, some landlords brought their guns. Two girijans were shot dead on the spot."

From the earliest days of the Girijan Sangh, the landlords started to thwart its activities in all deceitful and brutal manner. As early as in 1960, they tried to murder Comrade Vempatapu Satyanarayana, even by them the most popular personality amongst the girijans. Because of utmost vigilance he escaped from the dastardly plan. Within a short period after that, the landlords tried to beat up Comrade Adibatla Kailasam in Pedakherja village. In 1964, the President of Mondemkhal gram panchayat was severely assaulted in broad daylight by the appointed gangsters of the landlords. In the same year, when one of the activists of Girijan Sangh, Comrade Vallabhudu, visited Gumma Lakshmi Puram, he was also brutally assaulted till he fell down unconscious. Feeling confident of police support to them, the landlords, under the leadership of the well known rich gangster Medidha Sathyam, attacked a procession of the girijans who were proceeding to a public meeting to ventilate their demand for higher wages. It will be interesting to note that the very people who were assaulted, including Comrade Ramalinga Chary, were charge-sheeted. On May 13, 1967, as Comrade Vempatapu Satyanarayana was sleeping in front of his house, the farm servant of Medidha Sathyam along with another person came to murder him. Luckily, the owners of another house who were awake shouted to put them on their heels. On July 19, 1967, Pempeni Suri and a few others waited to shoot Comrade Vempatapu Satyanarayana. Knowing their plan, he avoided their hide-out and escaped being shot down. On the same day, three girijans, Mandangi Govindudu, Chiddika Mangadu, and Arika Buddadu, of Kotapadu colony were severely assaulted in Gumma Lakshmi Puram. Immediately after this incident, the agents of the landlords began parading openly announcing that they would murder Comrade Burasanna, an activist of Girijan Sangham. The agitated girijans mustered their strength to face them and they took to their heels. On July 20, 1967, when girijans of Morama village - Tadaki Bapanna, Chowdangi Dhandani, and another woman - came to Gumma Lakshmi Puram for some purchases they were also severely beaten. These are only extremely few examples of hundreds of such instances of landlord high-handedness during these years.



## Police Repression

During the early period of the formation of Girijan Association and legal, peaceful, agitation and struggle against illegal exactions of the landlords and their high-handed violent behaviour, what was the attitude of the Government and its police? Did the Government and its law and order agency, the police, ever bother to enquire into the charge of the girijans that forest officials are illegally exacting not only forced labour but also **mamools** from the uneducated girijans? Did the Government ever try to find out the truth of the allegation of the girijans and their organisation - the Srikakulam Girijan Sangh - that the landlords and the traders are deceiving the girijans with small illegal measure when they pay them and are exacting unheard of interest on the loans fleece them to their bones? Did they even bother to check the landlords' high-handed confiscation of the forest produce of the girijans at the lowest of the low rates in the name of having aided them with loans even though the law prohibits anyone, other than the girijan marketing society, from purchasing them from girijans? Not only were the girijans looted with Shylockian interest rates, but even their lands became landlords' property against all cannons of the law promulgated by the government. Did the police in all these years ever entertain one complaint of girijans and their organisation - the Girijan Sangh - and take action against the landlords for their brutal violence against the girijans?

No. On the other hand, in all these years, on the basis of the reports from the landlords, extreme repression was instituted against thousands of girijans and the organisers of Girijan Sangh. Innumerable cases were filed against girijans. Thousands have trekked the path from their home to the Courts. Thousands more were sent to the jails. New police outposts were opened in Mondemkhal and Neelakantapuram. In the period of transplantation and harvest it had become a common sight of encampment of the reserve police in that area to strike terror in the hearts of the girijans who were fighting for their justifiable demand of increase in wages.

It was under such landlord high-handedness and police repression, that the girijans firmly united in their fighting organisation the Girijan Sangh, under the leadership of the revolutionary-minded Communists, won remarkable successes

on various issues. Forced labour and labour given free were abolished. **Mamools** to forest and other officials were annulled. Wages were increased. High interest rates were brought down.

Such were the memorable victories, that the landlords, in close cooperation with the government had decided to put an end to this growing revolt of the girijans for ever. The year 1967 is a memorable year which led to total armed revolt of the girijans against armed attacks of the landlords and the government. The peaceful agitation of the girijans was forced into the historic armed revolt of the Srikakulam girijans.

In the sowing and plantation season of 1967, the girijans under the leadership of Girijan Sangh announced the wage rates which the girijans demanded from the landlords. Meetings and processions proclaiming the new rates were the order of the day. Having noted the victories of the united and the fighting girijans, the movement spread to new areas like a tidal wave. The landlords were flabbergasted. The movement even spread to Gumma Lakshmi Puram, the citadel of the landlords of the area. Nefarious plans were secretly hatched by the landlords. The landlords of Gumma Lakshmi Puram actually became mad. One of the cattle sheds of the landlords was set on fire as per the plans hatched by the landlords. Reports on 'Communist arson' flew into the police station. Direct attacks on the girijans were started. The landlords visited Hyderabad. Additional police force was injected into the area. Section 144 was announced in 200 villages (including girijan gudems) of this mountainous area from July 24 to August 25, 1967. In Gumma Lakshmi Puram and Lakkaguda, police parades and marches became a daily occurrence. Police atrocities and landlord violence increased phenomenally. The innocent and uneducated girijan was learning political lessons out of this experience. The experience teachers - the landlords and the government - vastly extended and improved the education of the illiterate forest tribes during this short period of a few months by their co-ordinated offensive step against the girijans.

Even under all these provocations the united militant Girijan Sangh continued its activities and extended its sphere of influence. In these few months of immense activity for increased wages and land, hundreds of girijans were beaten. A few more hundreds were taken to the police station to terrorise and torture them. A few girijan activists were arrested, including Comrade

Appala Suri, Secretary of the District Agricultural Labour Union.

Thousands of instances of brutal terror by the landlords could be given. I believe these are enough to show the trend of events in that area which led to the armed retaliation of the girijans against the landlords.

### Democracy in Action

It was in such circumstances, leading to a dangerous situation, that on August 16 in a press conference, I had deplored the promulgation of section 144 and the beating up of a large number of people under the "direct instigation of the landlords" (Indian Express August 18, 1967). Express reports that I had "appealed to the Government to withdraw section 144 and stop police repression to create proper conditions for an impartial and truthful enquiry".

In direct reply to this statement "a spokesman of the Srikakulam District Police" announced through the Indian Express under the dateline August 20, from Vijayanagaram, that the "Left Communists are responsible for the present trouble in the Agency area of Parvathipuram taluk" and that they "began inciting the farm labourers to revolt" and that "the wages demanded by the labourers for transplantation were very high."

Thus the police, through this statement, not only became politicians but also proved themselves to be the agents of the landlords. They openly came out against the demand of the girijans for increase in wages and openly supported the landlords who wanted the **status quo** to be maintained. This statement of the police spokesman talked about "**China Party**" and of processionists "shouting violent slogans and threatening landlords with violence".

Thus my request to the government for an impartial and truthful enquiry got rejected through a petty police official turned into a politician. This only emboldened the landlords to turn to still more violent activities leading to unprovoked shooting down of two girijans in October 1967.

After the shooting down of the two girijans, instead of action being taken against the landlords, the law and order department from top to the bottom moved swiftly against the girijans and the

Communists. Inspired stories about girijan lawlessness were set afloat. And every conceivable repression was implemented. As Hindu reported in February 1968, "tension in the area has been mounting after the incident in the Levidi village (about a mile from Gumma Lakshmipuram) where two persons were shot dead". It was clear even from the report of the Hindu that the tension in the areas has been mounting after the shooting down of the two girijans by the landlords and the government's failure to take any action against those who are responsible for the death of the girijans. It was known to every person in the area that the landlords who had actually shot down the two girijans were moving about freely, living in their homes and yet the police did not care even to arrest them.

It was in such circumstances that on March 4, 1968, I had "warned the government that feudal elements were raising their head again in the villages and indulged in atrocities" (Hindu March 6, 1968) and that "If this was allowed to continue dangerous consequences would follow." (Deccan Chronicle March 6, 1968). And I demanded an investigation into these incidents.

In addition to thousands of arrests of the girijans, looting of their homes and molestation of women indulged in by the police and the landlord goondas, the girijans were shot dead again, this time by the police in Pedakarya village in the first week of March 1968, killing two of them on the spot and injuring a few others. I had reported in the Assembly at the time that no less than 3,500 girijans were arrested on various false charges (Andhra Jyoti, March 6, 1968). Again, within a few days, a demand was made for "an enquiry into the unrest and the series of incidents that were taking place in that area" (Deccan Chronicle, Marh 9, 1968). Again it was rejected by the Chief Minister and his only answer was that "the Left Communists stop their activity" and that "peace must be there at any cost" (Hindu). As things were moving dangerously close to the terror witnessed in the Nazi concentration camps, and the despoilation of the villages by the landlords and the police as in South Vietnam, again the demand for an impartial investigation was made on the basis of the reports of police goonda atrocities in Borraguda village where innumerable number of women were molested. This demand supported by the opposition parties was again rejected by the Chief Minister on the plea that "It was not the time now for a committee", and that "the problem in Parvathipuram

tribal Agency was primarily a law and order problem."

(Indian Express, March 13, 1968).

Even the bourgeois Press felt the imperative need for an enquiry. In a review on the Assembly proceedings Deccan Chronicle had written that, "there was perhaps a case for an all-party probe into the incident Mr. Nagi Reddy referred to. Truth has to be established by an impartial body not merely for the satisfaction of the Marxist leaders but also for all those interested in the rule of law." (March 12, 1968).

The Times of India on March 22, 1968, reporting on the proceedings of this Assembly remarked "that the Chief Minister has persistently turned down an opposition demand for a judicial enquiry into a series of incidents in Srikakulam" and "angrily the Chief Minister told him (meaning Nagi Reddy) that any further deaths in Parvathipuram tribal area due to police firing or skirmishes would be the responsibility of the Communist Marxists." The brutal plan hatched by the government of Andhra Pradesh to massacre the people of the Agency area was laid bare for all to see. As the Times of India reported "so far the police have found it easier to side with the plains people in 'he frequent quarrels'" it was plain to see that the Chief Minister's announcement only gave an open expression to what was already taking place in the area and to carry it forward to the bitterest end.

I have had to re-trace this recent history to show how it was the government and the landlords that had consciously conspired against the people to suppress their organised fight for their legitimate demands. It was the government and the landlords who used all the illegal methods against the people. It was the landlords and their gangsters that created terror in the villages. It was the landlords that used lethal weapons including guns for the first time against the people. It was the police who opened fire on the girijans. It was the landlords and the government that openly declared war on the peasants.

It was only when the peasants found that every legal agitation only brought forth illegal brutal means of repression on their heads that they woke up to the realisation that the landlords' government had no legal bounds in putting down the downtrodden, however legal their demands be. They saw that all their

representations to the government on the illegal means of extraction of free labour and **mamools** to the landlords and the government officials went unheeded. Their representations about abnormally low wages were not even enquired into. Their petitions and agitation against illegal confiscation of land by the landlords did not move the 'constitution-bound' rulers. On the other hand, illegal arrests, tortures and shootings against the people became the order of the day.

I would like to ask who were the conspirators ? Was it the people who fought bravely against illegal, immoral desperados of the despicable landlords and their servile government ? Or was it the government and the landlords who for the past so many years acted against all the so called canons of the Constitution, not only robbed them of their land and labour but visited them like the plague with all the Nazi brutality with illegal arrests, tortures and finally started the shooting game to destroy their will to fight ?

For the present, there is jubilation heard from all the bourgeois parties and their servitors over the temporary setback to the great resistance put up by the girijans. Forcible repression might have temporarily succeeded. But I can do no better than quote Marx and Engels who, on the basis of the experiences of the 1848 Revolution, in general, and of the German Revolution, in particular, wrote in "Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution" as follows :

*"A more signal defeat than that undergone by the continental revolutionary party - or rather parties upon all points of the line of battle cannot be imagined. But what of that? Has not the struggle of the British middle classes for their social and political supremacy embraced forty-eight, that of the French middle classes, forty, years of unexampled struggles? And was their triumph ever nearer than at the very moment when restored Monarchy thought itself more firmly seated than ever? ... If, then, we have been beatend, we have nothing else to do but to begin again from the beginning. And, fortunately, the probably very short interval of rest, which is allowed us between the close of the first and the beginning of the second act of the movement, gives us time for a very necessary piece of work; the study of the causes that necessitated both the late outbreak and its defeat, causes that are not to be sought for in the accidental efforts, talents, faults, errors or treacheries of some of the leaders, but in the general social state and conditions of existence*

*of each of the convulsed nations ..... When you enquire into the causes of the counter revolutionary successes, there you are met on every hand with the ready that it was Mr. This or That citizen who 'betrayed' the people. Which reply may be true or not, according to circumstances, but under circumstances does it explain anything - not even show how it came to pass that the 'people' allowed themselves to be thus betrayed. And what a poor chance stands a political party whose entire stock-in trade consists in a knowledge of the solitary fact that citizen so and so is not to be trusted."*

Therefore, temporary setbacks should be used by the revolutionaries to study deeply every aspect of the movement and come to certain broad conclusions, to gain valuable experiences to broaden and intensify the struggle. Let the counter revolutionaries and the ruling class shout temporary jubilation from every available house-top! But the revolutionaries know it to be only short lived. He who laughs last laughs best. That was why Marx and Engels remarked in relation to the restoration of monarchy between 1640 and 1680 in England and between 1729 and 1830 in France : "And was their triumph (the triumph of middle classes : Tr.) ever nearer than at the very moment when restored monarchy though itself more firmly settled than ever?" The bourgeois-landlord government after un-heard-of terror, not even experienced in the period of direct rule of the British, has temporarily felt jubilant at a fake victory over the people, and is thinking of being "itself more firmly settled than ever". In this "short interval of rest", it is the duty of the revolutionaries to historically and self-critically analyse these five years of the glorious period of convulsions. As Marx said, "*the enquiry into, and exposition of, the causes, both of the revolutionary convulsion and its suppression, are besides, of paramount importance from the historical point of view.*" (Karl Marx, "Selected Works" Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., Volume II June 11, 1943, Page 41).

There will be many, like the revisionists, who will proclaim the '*unsuitability*' of peasant agrarian revolution at this moment and try to spread, demoralisation and disintegration among peasant masses and cadres taking advantage also of the savage repression let loose by the big bourgeois - landlord government. But the revolutionaries who are aware of the growing all round economic and political crisis which the bourgeoisie is facing today, know that its days of jubilation are short lived. The revolutionaries

must keep in mind and work according to the behests of Lenin who proclaimed in 1907 as follows :

*"Let it not be thought that, at the present moment of history when the Black Hundred diehards are howling and raging in the Third Duma, when plus ultra of rampant counter revolution has been reached and reaction is perpetrating savage acts of political vengeance upon the revolutionaries in general and the Social - Democratic deputies in the Second Duma in particular - let it not be thought that this moment is 'unsuitable' for 'broad' agrarian programme. Such a thought would be akin to the backsliding, despondency, disintegration and decadence which have spread among wide sections of petty bourgeois intellectuals who belong to the Social Democratic Party, or sympathise with this party in Russia. The proletariat can only gain by having this rubbish swept clean out of the ranks of the workers' party. Yes, the more savagely reaction rages, the more does it actually retard the inevitable economic development, the more successfully does it prepare the wider upsurge of the democratic movement. And we must take advantage of the temporary lulls in action certifiably to study the experience of the great revolution, verify this experience, purge it of dross, and pass it on to the masses as a guide for the impending struggle"; (Lenin : "Agrarian Programme of Social Democracy", "Collected Works", Volume 13, Page 429).*

During this period of confusion, inevitable at a time of savage acts of political vengeance by the bourgeois - landlord government, certain sections of the revolutionary movement slip out and betray it in various forms. There will be many at this hour who will justify their revisionist role by proclaiming the '*unsuitability*' of peasant actions for peasant agrarian upsurge. Taking advantage of temporary lull, they will use all methods, in addition to government repression, to disrupt and demoralise the revolutionary ranks. It is the duty of the revolutionaries now to analyse and explain the experiences of the great struggles that have taken place, to prepare for further implementation of the agrarian programme by directly taking these experiences to the masses for the preparation of the impending struggle.