

Pool of Blood

(Rakta kasaram)



AMPASAYYA NAVEEN

Translated by: Dr. Lanka Siva Rama Prasad

Edited by: A. Aravind Reddy

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A Novel by **Ampashayya Naveen**

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First Edition : March 2015

Price : Rs. 200/- \$5

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Andhra Pradesh (India)

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Cover Design & D.T.P. Setting :

Prakash Pula

Printed at

Vasavi Printers, Warangal.

Ph: 0870-2426364

Foreword

Naveen is a frank and outspoken writer who never hesitates to treat controversial issues with utmost honesty and boldness. While most other writers fight shy of treating themes that are potentially controversial he courageously treats them in his novels because of his commitment to truth. While doing so he does not take sides. He remains absolutely impartial and offers a faithful account of both sides of the argument. In the case of *Pool of Blood* both the oppressors—the landlords and the police combine, and the oppressed—who are supported by the leftist revolutionaries—find impartial treatment.

There has been no other novel, either in Telugu or in any other Indian language, which is dealt with the controversial theme of leftist revolutionaries versus police. *Pool of Blood* thus emerges as a pioneering work of fiction. In this novel Naveen gives a graphic picture of the bloodshed that has taken place in the war between the leftist revolutionaries and police and between the oppressed and dominant sections of society.

Pool of Blood, in its original Telugu version, had difficulty in finding a publisher because of its controversial and explosive content. It was believed that it would not go beyond the first print. But because of its very controversial nature it captured the imagination of the reading public who saw in it their own life and history faithfully represented. The novel went on to attract the attention of translators in Hindi, Marathi and English who saw in it much that would be of interest to the readers in these languages. The novel was translated into Hindi as *Khoon ka Talaab* by R.Shantha Sundari, and was published by Milind Prakashan, Hyderabad. Shantha Sundari is the daughter of the famous Telugu writer Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao.

The Hindi version of the novel became extremely popular with readers across the country. *Pool of Blood* is also being translated into Marathi under the title *Thambde Paani* by Kanchan Jatkari. It is now the time to share the glory of this great novel with the English reading public.

The translator of this novel Dr. L.S.R. Prasad is a medical doctor by profession and a writer by avocation. He is a well known scholar in Telugu, Sanskrit and English. He has many translations, from Telugu to English, to his credit including Pothana's epic poem the *Mahabharatam*.

A.Aravind Reddy, the editor, is a doctorate in English from Kakatiya University, Warangal. He worked for his Ph.D on the fiction of the Canadian novelists Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood. He has several publications and translations to his credit.

- Prof. Rajeshwar Mittapalli

POOL OF BLOOD

(Rakta kasaram)

HISTORY

In that famous island which was supposed to be the central division of the world, millions of people lived from the times immemorial. It was called Jambu Island because of the abundant Jambolam trees.

“We have rich heritage. Our cultural roots are strong. Our grandfathers consumed ghee. You can smell it from our lips” such type of anecdotes frequent their conversations. Wise men say that these islanders have the nature of going with the wind.

They always welcomed the stronger foreign invaders with folded hands but treated the native rulers with contempt. If somebody dared to fight, these dubious characters sold their secrets to the enemies and watched the fun.

They always fought among themselves. In the name of religion, caste and creed they built permanent barriers separating one another. Using the powerful ‘divide and rule’ policy they made further divisions among the people comprising high, middle and low class strata. These high class citizens, though a few in number, grabbed power and oppressed the majority lower strata people. Initially the division was along the lines of work but later it became hereditary and codified.

Many kings ruled that island. Even the kings of everlasting fame tried to reinforce the already existing iron frames. The walls between the people became thicker and thicker as the time progressed. Nobody ever thought of the idea of equality among the fellow human beings. Kings always supported the higher strata and punished the poor with menial labour.

In the later times the higher strata made the people believe that the division was decided by the God, and it is his sporting nature to create people in various roles of skilled workers to benefit the society. They quoted examples from the secret texts prepared by themselves and codified the responsibilities of each working class assigning them a permanent caste. The hapless poor gradually believed these ideas and considered the higher strata as the twice born and the earth born gods.

Thus these earth deities kept reading and writing for themselves leaving the majority stuck to the work. They devised 16 Karmas—Shodasa Karmas—the functions and punishments and the rituals to be performed and their exacting price. Thus caste-workers worked with nature and produced the produce and those who supervised it got the lion share. Workers never had any surplus but the supervisors who never worked had sufficient to support the armed people whose work is mere safeguarding the interests of their supporters. Thus the skilled workers became poorer and the higher strata grew still higher.

The descendents of higher strata of today also stress that in the sacred texts every technology was written in bold mystic letters but those books were confiscated by the foreign invaders and they invented rail engines, aeroplanes, telephones, electricity, atom bombs, computers and all other modern gadgetery. But they fail to answer as to why our people could not invent these things earlier.

People from the other islands attacked this island and found least resistance from the local leaders. So they came in hordes and robbed the island with impunity and with them they

carried away unlimited riches, slaves and agricultural produce. For instance, one Turkish king invaded this country as many as eighteen times and each time he fled with countless riches and wealth.

These islanders never tried to resist the invaders unitedly. They believed that their saviour and the great god would appear at an appropriate time to save them. The holy scriptures had the power to protect them, they thought. So whenever somebody attacked them they chanted the mystical letters nonstop, without even thinking about their self-protection.

If any warrior among them stood up with arms against the invaders they discouraged him saying- “poor fellow! What are you up to? Everything is predetermined! What is in your hands? You are just a play-thing in the hands of gods. You are just an illusion. This war is an illusion. The killed and the killers are both illusions. This whole world is an illusion. You, I, our enemies and everyone is an illusion. The real world is out there. And the way to reach it is also there. Try to understand the way. We will help you reach that ultimate bliss.”

Soon the island came under the control of another island. The foreign islanders exploited the walls between these people effectively for their own progress. So the divisions among the people remained ever the same. The higher-ups propagated the ideology of God’s will and man’s subservience well instilled into the minds of people of the lower strata permanently. Poor people! They are made to believe thus: “even the ant cannot bite harder, without the God’s command; the right to exploit is the divine right of the twice-born; you are born in the lower (caste) because of your committed sins in your previous birth.” They always kept such maxims in their mind and went on to follow the instructions given to them by the higher strata of society without any question.

Meanwhile several developmental changes took place in the neighbouring islands.

New theories and new inventions brought great changes in the people's life styles.

Modern machines simplified the once painstaking procedures. Speed became the watch word. Printing machine revolutionised the world in disseminating knowledge. Books became cheaper and literacy rate increased. With knowledge the thinking process improved and people started questioning the issues hitherto untouched. The free thinkers began probing into the imaginary issues such as- upper worlds, gods, demons, religions, magic, beatitude... and found them as false projections. They identified man as the ultimate being and declared that human being is the measure for everything. He is the touchstone and the measuring scale. This kind of new thinking among people paved way for proper solutions to several unanswered questions.

People have recognised that nobody has the right to exploit others and divide them into social categories such as high, middle and lower strata. May be all of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have equal opportunity to improve our talent. Emperors, kings, artisans, peasants, big people, small people- at the bottom are all alike and same; and when our clothes are off, nobody can tell, which of us is which. Equality- the informing soul of freedom- is everybody's right! Once after they had recognised their right for freedom, the middle and lower class people rebelled against the higher and the ruling class. Revolutions after revolutions emerged like waves inundating the tyrants and ruling class oppressors. The earth was stained due to lot of bloodshed. The era of the higher class rule ended with a sigh of relief to the poor. Everybody realized their rights. Freedom, fraternity, and equality became their watch words. Thus the people of that island had developed it into a new socio-political, economic society based upon the principles of freedom, equality and scientific outlook.

Even when the whole world was boiling with revolutions, the Jambu Island remains still dark and static. The higher class

in this island felt that those changes were undesirable. They interpreted that these revolutions transformed man into demon. So they imposed restrictions to the people on visiting the foreign lands, forbade crossing the seas and punished the trespassers. Yet a few of the Jambu Islanders crossed the seas and acquired the modern thoughts and skills. When they came back to their own land, they understood the pitiable state of their own people. They recognised the miserable slave life of the majority and the lack of freedom and equality in the name of karma or the effect of the sins of the past birth. They started a great struggle for the rights of freedom and self-rule. The ruling British island fellow announced independence to the Jambu Island and left. The people of the Jambu Island celebrated their independence in a grand way.

Some people in the island argued that this independence was not at all a complete one. They said that the so called independence did not liberate the lower strata, since the power was still in the hands of the educated higher strata. Only the foreign educated were liberated and power went into their hands from the foreign rulers in a clandestine way. Now they have money and power, they too follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. The political and economical power is now in the hands of the foreign educated higher strata and the landlords. Unless the majority lower strata stand up and fight unitedly against the ruling upper class, the joy of celebrating independence will vanish in a few days. The true Independence Day is the day when power falls into the hands of the lower strata. The exponents of this theory are termed as young militants or radicals.

“Equality follows freedom,” said the freedom fighters. These people founded Kurangeese party. ‘People have the equal right to vote their leaders and elect them to the Assembly, so by proxy they have their say in the government. As everybody has the right to vote it is the indicator of equality. Others have not accepted this clarification. This right to vote is the wrong way of attaining equality. The rich buy the votes and the innocent poor

sell them for petty gains. The long term benefits are reaped by the higher classes. The power and money makes them more tyrannical. So to eliminate this ruling class's power hunger and oppression thirst, the poor have to fight unitedly and participate in the armed struggle for their emancipation. Then the ruling class tries to resist it by resorting to violent methods. Thus the state violence reflects the tyranny in various proportions.

They said – we will unite the people and answer the state violence by counter measures. Power comes only through the barrel of gun. So the poor must take up the rifles to make the revolution successful in bringing out a classless and stateless society. That is utopia. That is the dream world of the intellectuals. That is the world where humanity blossoms. Those radicals argued thus and soon they started the armed struggle in many parts of the country. The ruling Kurangeese party suppressed most of these radicals ruthlessly. But the armed struggle in the Trilinga Island was beyond their control.

In the South of the Jambu Island is the smaller Trilinga Island. It was ruled for hundreds of years by the Minar kings. But they had minimal contact with the people. These rulers were famous as the kings of kings. Their capital city was Jahanabad. The villages under them were controlled by 'Doras' - the local lords. People considered them baddies. These Doras took control of the farm lands by foul means from the ordinary people. The peasants who cultivated these lands were reduced to the status of mere tenants. These feudal Doras used to torture the peasants who were unable to pay taxes and get hold of their lands. They used to lend agricultural products like grain, chillies etc. to the peasants at higher rates of interest and later under the pretext of non-payment of these loans, they would confiscate the lands. The villagers were controlled by the Doras and their sub-ordinates like Patels, Patwaris, Malipatels and the Village Chiefs. Under their constant oppression peasants and workers suffered in penury and hunger.

They exploited the skilled workers by not paying for their labour. Some peculiar systems of forced labour- like Vetti (using the services of labour without payment) and Bhagela made the poor peasants' lives to utter degradation and abject serfdom. If anybody raised war against this cruel system then he would be tortured to the point of death. Minar kings were unaware of these issues. They were happy with the money they were receiving as a tribute from the Doras and so they were always unmindful of the people's suffering. They never bothered about the periodical measures to be taken up to improve the agricultural sector. There were no other facilities except the fresh water lakes of the age old Kakatiya dynasty.

The British rulers did some developmental works in the areas of their control over Jambu Island. They constructed large scale dams for irrigation and established schools to promote education. Later, they left the country declaring independence to the Jambu Island. But the seventh king of Minar dynasty refused to give independence to the Trilinga Island. Thus the people revolted against him and the local landlords—Doras. The leaders of this people's movement were called revolutionaries.

The Minar king sent his army to suppress the agitating people. A monstrous wing of that army infamously known as 'Volunteers,' fell upon the villages at will and subjected the people to all kinds of torture and committed many atrocities on them.

This situation made all the people united under the leadership of the revolutionaries in order to resist them. They fought against the hired goondas of Doras and the cruel 'Volunteers' of the Minar army. Thousands of people laid their lives with streams of blood around.

The Doras sensed the pulse of the people and fled their villages to live in Jahanabad. The revolutionaries distributed the lands of the Doras to the landless peasants. They implemented the principle "land belongs to the tiller- and the ownership of the land to the farmers." They destroyed the buildings and forts of the Darjas. They effectively answered the attacks of their enemies.

Meanwhile the Independent Government of the Jambu Island after having monitored the deteriorating situation in the Trilinga Island sent its army to defeat the Minar king. It assigned two major tasks to the army: firstly to make the Minar king and his 'Volunteers' surrender, and secondly to subdue the revolutionaries.

Within two or three days of the arrival of the army, the Minar king came to his heels. His surrender was simple and unconditional with out least resistance. The Trilinga Island was merged with the Jambu Island. Then the army started hunting the revolutionaries.

One group of these revolutionaries favoured the cessation of the armed struggle as the Minar king was already eliminated. But the other faction decided to continue the struggle to eradicate the menace of Doras for they were considered to be the pests of the society. If not this menace would surely return to society in another form. They argued that the government of Jambu Island would do nothing for upliftment of the downtrodden and hence they believed that the armed struggle should be continued. So, they continued it. About six thousand revolutionaries had lost their lives during the armed struggle before they announced the ceasefire and retrieved from the armed struggle. The Ballot was preferred to bullet since then.

The Doras returned to the villages with much vengeance in their mind. They reoccupied the lands that were once distributed to the landless poor. The Doras donned the robes of Kurangeese and seized again the thrones now masked with democratic linen.

As the time passed, the Kurangeese government went on introducing several reforms. One of such reforms was the Land Reformation Act that paved the way for procuring lakhs of acres of surplus land to be distributed to the landless poor. It announced the abolition of the system of Doras and their privileges and pledged to eradicate poverty and promised to introduce the socialism of their own mark. The government declared that all

these radical changes could be implemented by peaceful means as there was no place for violence in democracy. It promised to develop the island in all fronts by constructing dams across rivers, digging canals to improve agriculture with better irrigation, establishing industries in public sector and schools in all villages, and so on...

People believed their words. They voted the Kurangeese party to power. But within few days of their return to power, the politicians came out with their true colours. In their rule the rich became richer and the poor still poorer. The implementation of land reforms was a total failure. The surplus land was unavailable. Not a single piece of land was distributed among the poor. One group of revolutionaries reassessed the situation and indicted the ballot and favoured the bullet. This separated group began propagating that the ruling power would be possible only through the barrel of gun.

The revolutionaries in the Trilinga Island again started their armed struggle but this time against the mighty army of Jambu Island. Thus the sky of the Trilinga Island was filled with clouds of war again.

2

Today...

Midnight...

Vangala town is serene and silent

Roads are empty

Street lights are busy and bright.

Stray dogs are barking in streams as though they have smelt some disaster.

Now and then a car or a scooter is disrupting the deadly silence.

The moaning of the dogs created some vague fear in the hearts of the neighbouring people

The police station at the end of the street is also unusually sleepy unlike every day.

A sentry with a loaded rifle in hand is standing outside the police station in attention.s

At that time two constables brought a young man in chains to the police station.

Inside his office, the station house officer is talking to somebody on his phone. With a height of six and half feet and a weight of 85 kilograms he looked almost like a giant. With a rough and hardened face, handle bar moustache, large and sharp eyes, fair complexion, and well groomed hair, he has a stunning personality of that of a hero.

He is not only known for his strictness but a nightmare to the antisocial elements and criminals.

He is Jithender Reddy.

“Sir, we have brought a suspect,” said the constables saluting their officer.

Jithender Reddy examined the suspect from top to bottom.

That person was wearing pajama (long linen pant) and white shirt splashed with black smudges. Aged between twenty five and thirty, he was a tall and lean man with wheatish complexion, bushy bearded and whiskered face, small but sharp eyes with penetrating looks, cigarette smoke burnt dark lips, uncombed and haphazardly moving reed like hair — with all these features he appeared like a person came from faraway land. A pink coloured cotton bag was hanging over his right shoulder. There was something strange but special in his appearance.

“Who is he? Where have you got him from?” asked Jithender Reddy.

“Sir, we don’t know who he is. Having not convinced of his answers we thought there was something suspicious about him. On our routine patrol duty we went to the Railway station. This fellow got down the rickshaw and was going into the station in a hurry. We tried to stop him. Without answering us he moved ahead. When we ordered him to stop but he started running at once. We chased him and held him in chains and brought him here,” said Nazeer, one of the constables.

“Who are you?” asked Jithender Reddy starting interrogation of the suspect.

“I am from Munagala village”

“Your name?”

“Pramod.”

“Which Pramod?”

“Ooraboyina Pramod.”

“What do you do?”

“I am studying Law. I was going to my village when your men intercepted me. Leave me. I have to go to my village.”

“Your name is Pramod? I saw you somewhere! Search his bags.”

“You have no right to search my bag. Let me go!”

“Really! you are talking about rights, aren’t you? Are you member of Civil Liberties Union?”

“May I know, under which section of law you have brought me here and begun searching my personal belongings?”

“Sure! First let me remember where I have seen you?” Jithender Reddy opened the steel cupboard. He searched for some files and identified one and went through it fast. He stared at some photos in the file and his face glowed with joy.

“A small fish I thought, but it is a whale,” Jithender Reddy exclaimed. “Dear Nazeer and Perumallu! You have done a good job unknowingly. You have really caught a big fish, which has a price of one lakh rupees over its head. Say! You have won the lottery. You have hit the jackpot.”

“Sir, really!” exclaimed Nazeer and Perumallu delightedly.

They searched him. They searched his bag. They found a few hundred rupee notes in his pocket. His bag contained a lungi, an underwear, a few books and a diary.

They took him into the cellar of the building.

Within half an hour the police station became as busy as the Sunday market. ‘A big fish of great importance was in their net.’ A message was transmitted to all police stations nearby. So the officers clad in their civil dress reached the station within a few minutes after the message and entered the cellar.

That person was made to sit on a stool. All the officers settled around him. Jithender Reddy was the only one who was in uniform. The room was bright with the tube lights glowing in full. A thousand volted headlight bulb was focussed on to the victim’s face who was unable to open his eyes.

“Mister, you look here! Answer our questions and you had better tell us the truth! If we are convinced that you have no association with the underground revolutionary organizations then you’ll be let free, okey?”

“Thanks,” he said in a low voice.

“Your name...?”

“Pramod.”

“Your real name?”

“Pramod. Ooraboyina Pramod.”

“No! Your are not Pramod. You are Jagan. Kanthamaneni Jaganmohan Rao.”

“No! My name is Pramod.”

“No! Your name is Jagan. Other names are Jagan alias Ravi alias Sudheer alias... Abdul... am I right?”

“No! I am Pramod. I have no such aliases. I am Pramod. Only Pramod.”

“What do you do?”

“I am studying Law at Sanghamitra College...”

“You are lying! You had discontinued Mechanical Engineering course at Regional Engineering College before you went into the forests.”

“You are mistaken. I am Pramod. I am a law student. I am going my home. I am totally innocent. Please, release me.”

“So you are totally innocent! Wonderful, Mister Jagan! Wonderful! Then who is this guy in this photograph?” Jithender Reddy flashed it at him.

He opened his eyes slowly. The light was too much to bear.

“I don’t know.”

“Is n’t that your photograph?”

“No! no! no!...there may be some resemblance...but it is not my photograph...!”

“You think you are too clever Mister Jaganmohan Rao... but we are cleverer than you. You must come out and reveal everything...OK!”

“I have nothing to reveal. I am Pramod. I am doing my second year in Sanghamitra Law college...My native place is Munagala. My father Ooraboyina Komaraiah; my mother Rajavva. That’s all. Go and verify the details if you wish. That’s all I can tell you...”

“Where is your identification card?”

“I forgot to bring it.”

“Good excuse but not much to convince us... and you move around at midnight...that too in Vangala town...here nobody ventures to come out side after ten at night. But you are bold enough to walk into the railway station at midnight... without any identification card... Do you think the police are crazy...Mister Jagan! Don't waste our time. Tell us about the other members of your squad.”

“I have no squad! No members...”

“No jokes! You are testing our patience.”

“I am not joking...”

“Stop your jokes and tell us the truth.”

“I have told you the truth.”

“We know and you also know it well that you are not telling the truth at the moment. If you are so adamant to reveal it, then we have our ways to deal with you to extract the truth.”

“Whatever you do with me, but I have nothing more to tell you.”

“Come on Nazeer! Perumallu! Help him...he is unable to spit the truth.”

The two constables tied his limbs tight. Perumallu started piercing sharp pins into his nails and fingers. The unfortunate victim cried with severe pain - “Ammal!”

“Come on! Tell us! Where are your other members? We have to arrest them to night!”

“I don't know!”

“Come on! Tell us! Before we start the second round...?”

“I don't know!”

Nazeer started sprinkling red chilli powder on his nails. The victim cried loud...“Amma!”

Then he was silent.

Jithender Reddy looked at Nazeer...

Nazeer started burning the palms of his hands with candle flames. The pain was unbearable. He cried again and again.

“Now tell us the truth!”

He was silent again.

Perumallu brought a jute-rope and tightened it around the head of the victim slowly. With each twist the intensity of pain multiplied and he started crying. Nazeer pushed some old cloth into his mouth and silenced him. Another constable poured ice-water on his face. The rope became too tight and it started cutting into the skin. He was in agony.

“Now tell us Jagan...won’t you?”

He did not budge.

“We won’t torture you anymore if you reveal everything,” said Jithender Reddy as though he was tired of his efforts. They removed the cloth that choked the victim.

“I have nothing to reveal. Release me, please!?” said he.

“Sorry Mister Jagan. We have to go on till you come out with the information about your comrades,” said Jithender Reddy.

Everybody was silent for a while.

“Come on Jagan! No more delay! Tell us... tell me...Don’t try to test our patience!”

“You are testing my patience.”

“Is that so?”

Jithender Reddy signalled the constables for the third round.

Nazeer and Perumallu lifted him up like a ball and hit him on to the floor. His head hit the hard surface and started bleeding.

“Come on, tell us now.”

He remained silent.

Suddenly Jithender Reddy felt very much exhausted and over powered by an unexplained defeat. What is this? Is he, a giant of a personality in power and strength losing the battle with a lilliput, a minion, a lean bearded guy? Impossible! I am Jithender, the giant, backed by one of the most powerful ‘states’ (kingdoms) in the world that has a vast army equipped with the most sophisticated weapons and a powerful government elected by crores of people. How can he afford to lose? Who is this fellow? What is his strength? What these few night rangers holding a few countrymade guns can do? Maybe I am over estimating his strength? No question of letting him win this game. This fellow must reveal the truth. There lies my victory,” Jithender Reddy made his decision.

“Mister Jagan! This is the last chance for you! Reveal the truth!”

The poor victim was lying on the floor with his head bleeding heavily. His eyes moved a little but the answer was –No!

Jithender Reddy turned towards Nazeer with hardened looks! Nazeer understood them.

The constables lifted the victim up... and up...and up...and dropped him on the floor. Once... twice... thrice... fourth time... the victim lost his consciousness. His head was broken, split like a coconut. There was blood everywhere. One of the constables tested his pulse and said slowly, “He died, sir.”

* * * *

Two days after this incident Police released their statement to the media, papers, television channels –“in an encounter

between police and revolutionaries in the Anakonda forest Jagan alias Ravi alias Abdullah—a member of the underground squad was killed. Police found a foreign made revolver, some party literature, a diary, a cash of ten thousand rupees beside his body. This militant was involved in eight murders, ten bus burning incidents and five house blasts. He has a price of one lakh rupees over his head.”

“Jagan was arrested by the police who tortured and killed him in the Anakonda forest and this fake encounter must be investigated by the High Court Judge.”-the civil liberties group gave their statement.

* * * *

After a few days...

Bazipet Railwat station was busy with travellers and vendors.

The simultaneous arrival of two trains made the station lie in conundrum, with people coming and going and entering their compartments in a hurry. Platforms were crowded with the people seeing their nearer and dearer off; vendors selling eatables, fruits, tea, coffee, soft drinks; coolies carrying the luggage.

On platform number one, near S3 compartment of Madanpur Express, Inspector Jithender Reddy was standing in uniform. Two gunmen were standing there with their rifles ready in position.

His wife Sumathi and his six year old daughter Ramya were at the windows of their berths. “Call me when you reach home,” said Jithender Reddy.

“Sure daddy,” his daughter replied.

“You have to return by the day after tomorrow,” he said looking into his wife’s beautiful eyes.

“Only two days? Impossible! Going so far just for two days is no fun at all. Two more days and we will be back,” she said showering his love on her.

She was a beautiful and charming woman. With large attractive eyes, golden yellow complexion, elongated face, black wavy hair, broad forehead adorned with red bindi... arresting the glances of passers-by with her radiant looks- she was totally immersed in conversation with her life-partner. A small time poet described the couple as the ‘beauty and the beast.’

“Four days! Surviving without you for four days! Impossible!” Jithender Reddy said.

His eyes were speaking.

She was looking at him with love and affection. “What is impossible? You say that now! When I am at home you spend most of your time on duty! Day and night, in and out! I know your duty is the first wife and I am your second wife.”

“No! No! Don’t say I neglect you. You are both my strength and life.”

“Really!” she was kidding him.

“I love you more than anything else. You know that,” he said in a soft voice.

Meanwhile, from the public address system an announcement by a nice female voice alerted the passengers. “Your attention please! Train Number 70018 - Madanpur-Jahanabad Express is ready to leave from platform number one.” This was repeated in Hindi and Telugu.

The platform became busy with the passengers running to reach their compartments from the nearby stalls.

“You must return by the same train by day after tomorrow,” said Jithender Reddy.

“No! Please let me spend some time with my brother’s family. Please.” she pleaded.

“Next time OK but this time ...No!”

“If I don’t come... what will you do?” she was teasing him.

“I will die...” even before he completed his sentence bullets fired by militants rained on him point blank. In a split second he and his two gunmen were shot dead. Within seconds a group of four other militants finished their mission and disappeared into the crowd.

Passengers ran helter-skelter by this sudden and shocking incident. The place was replete with terror. Sumathi saw her husband dying before her eyes and collapsed in her seat. Their daughter Ramya was crying “daddy, daddy...!”

It took some time for the people to comprehend the situation. Instincts told them to get out of the place instantly. People started fleeing from the scene. The news spread like wild-fire: “Inspector Jithender Reddy was killed by the revolutionaries.”

The Police rushed to the spot. The Reserve Police cordoned off the place immediately. Some of them started checking the passengers and started arresting the suspects. Within no time Bazipet Railway station appeared like a battle field.

Next day, the newspapers published full details of Jithender Reddy’s murder. They published the photos of his grief-stricken wife and daughter.

Chief Minister, ministers, police officers, the leaders of all the political parties condemned the killings. “In democracy there is no place for violence and problems can be solved by deliberations with positive attitude and peaceful agitations,” they reiterated

Media supported. Many newspapers published editorials and special articles in favour of ballot. They concluded saying

that bullet cannot bring out any socio-political change at this point of time.

Police officers paid their tributes to their colleagues. “Jithender Reddy was a competent officer who sacrificed his life in performing his duty of serving the public.”

“Violence begets violence. Unless they stop the fake encounters, these retaliatory killings will continue,” the members of Civil Liberty Union gave their statements.

“This government failed miserably in maintaining law and order. How can they provide security to common man when they cannot even protect a policeman?” the opposition leaders blamed the government.

The revolutionaries gave their statement: “Jithender Reddy was killed by the people for the brutal murder of our leader Jagan. It is a warning to other traitors and oppressors of the people.”

The next day afternoon Jithender Reddy’s funeral procession began. The procession started from his house to reach his home town nearby for funeral rites.

It was a heart rendering scene to see his wife frozen by grief.

As a token of respect his body was covered with the national flag and placed in a flower decked vehicle with the armed reserve police constables marching in front, the procession slowly moved along the streets of Vangala. People gathered on both sides of the road to have a glimpse of the slain police officer. Many police officers and constables followed the vehicle in plain clothes. The streets of Vangala town were reverberated with slogans and the angry warnings

“Jithender Reddy.....amar hai!”

“We will take revenge...we will take revenge!”

“For each murder... ten more murders”

“We will put an end... to the militant band.”

“Blood for blood” ... “Life for life”

“Beware, beware... clandestine unions beware.”

“Down, down... civil liberties union... down...down.”

“Eye for eye... Limb for Limb”

“Life for life!”

“Long live Police union...long live.”

The slogans, the cries and the roars reached sky high.

People came out of their houses to see the procession.
But their hearts were pounding in their chest.

“What happens to this country?” one onlooker said to another in almost inaudible words.

“To ruins! No future to this Trilinga Island.”

“How does this bloodshed come to an end?”

“Only God knows!”

“Both are cruel, stubborn, tenacious...”

“The calves die in clash between mad bulls...”

“Who cares the innocent?”

“One kills to maintain law and order, the other kills for the welfare of the people.”

“What is Law and order? Who are the people? Who is killing whom?”

People were discussing their own points of view among themselves in hushed tones.’

The procession was heading through the main road of Vangala town.

Dr. Raghuveer Singh was running his clinic at the main road in Vangala.

He was well known as the poor people's doctor. Rikshaw pullers, Hamali coolies, and other poor people go to his clinic. He was examining a patient when the procession reached the area of his clinic. He heard the commotion and asked his assistant about it.

"Yesterday the Sub Inspector of Police, Jithender Reddy was killed. His dead body is being taken away by the police in a procession to his home town for the funeral rites," his assistant answered.

"Let us go and see!?" said the doctor.

"No sir! They are crazy! Let us remain indoors," his assistant advised.

"I have treated the children of the policemen too! They won't do any harm to me," saying he went outside. "As a human being, one has to express his concern and sympathy," he said.

Then he noticed two persons in civil dress making their way towards him. He sensed some danger. He started running back into his clinic. But they chased him and shot him with their revolvers and disappeared into the crowd.

"The doctor has been shot by somebody! Help! Help!" the patients cried out for help. But the doctor breathed his last in his own clinic.

The next day newspaper headlines filled with red letters: "People's doctor murdered in cold blood."

"Doctor Raghuveer Singh was killed by the police and we condemn this cold-blooded murder. We demand that the culprits must be arrested and punished. An impartial inquiry must be conducted by a Supreme Court judge." The members of the civil liberties and human rights gave their statements.

Politicians made their stereotyped statements - “There is no place for violence in democracy, the culprits must be arrested and punished, the law must take its own course.”

The next day thousands of poor people attended the last rites of Dr. Raghuveer Singh. People burst into tears and wept the moment they saw his dead body. The entire area was gripped with silence. “A great mistake has taken place; a great loss to the society; what to do and what can we do?... such questions sprouted in many tender hearts. Where is the end to such murders?” they questioned themselves.

3

In the Department of Sociology situated in the Humanities building of the Somanadha University of Vangala town, five professors were discussing about many problems and the recent incidents that created panic and terror among the people. A Bandh was announced in protest against the murder of Dr. Raghuveer Singh, so they had no teaching classes on that day.

“What crime Dr. Raghuveer has committed to be killed in such a barbaric way? This is bad. This is crazy. We are mute witnesses to this social upheaval. We know the murderers and we cannot do anything to punish them. I feel like grabbing one AK-47 gun and kill the murderers of the doctor,” said Paramanandam... he is the professor of Sociology.

“What! You say this?” the professor of political science, Ravinder exclaimed.

“Yes. My blood is boiling, ...you know?” said Paramanandam.

“Then start right away. You can get AK-47 gun anywhere in this country. Come on! Do it! This will remove the stain on us as the easy chair intellectuals,” said Ravinder.

“Is this the truth? Tell me! Our professor Paramanandam cannot handle a few noisy students in his class and he talks about

AK-47 and shooting the assailants. Absurd! – said the History professor Vijaykumar.

“If professor Paramanandam does what he says, the armed struggle in this country will succeed definitely,” said Jaganmohan Rao the professor of Geography participating in the discussion.

“Do you think whether the revolution is a possibility in this country? When will be there an end to one’s exploitation by another? The exploitation of one another when is it going to end? Whether the casteless, creedless, nonreligious, classless society is possible in the near future? Is this a dream?” said Vidyasagar Reddy the professor of Economics.

“Dream must remain as a dream. If it becomes a reality it loses its charm. Like Plato’s Ideal State... let it be confined to the ancient scriptures. If dream becomes a reality, the difference perplexes the dreamer with immense pain and suffering,” said professor Ravinder.

“I’ll never agree with the leftists like you. You all dream about the classless and stateless society which is impossible in my view. Because the principle of equality is against the principle of nature. Children born of the same parents have unequal qualities. One child may be genius whereas the other child may fail in tenth class itself. How can he compete with another? It is all in your genes. Is it possible to have similar genes in everybody? Except in clones I don’t think it is possible in human society,” said Jaganmohan Rao.

“The expressions of Equality, liberty, socialism, communism... all these ideas won’t belong to this land. They sprouted in the west based on their economic and political conditions. We are just trying to implement these borrowed ideas of foreign origin in our land without studying them properly. This is a kind of an intellectual slavery...an ideological slavery... We have achieved independence from the British but their ideology is still ruling us. We have forgotten about our heritage. We simply imitate the western ideology,” said Ravinder.

“You are getting diverted from the topic. Tell me this! What is the motive behind the murder of the people’s doctor Raghuveer? A decent human being, a healer, and a social worker how can anybody kill him in such a brutal way? Horrible!” said Paramanandam.

“You are right about the doctor’s murder! There is no doubt about it! What about the murder of Jithender Reddy? He was also killed in the same fashion. Tell me what’s the crime that he has committed! He did his duty as a police officer. He was killed him in front of his wife and daughter. His life is also similar to that of others. No one has any right to take away the other people’s lives. We all know the value of life,” said Ravinder.

“You are quite unreasonable Ravinder! You are equating the killing of a cruel officer who had tortured and murdered a revolutionary with the murder of a humanist and an innocent doctor. This is preposterous,” said Paramnandam.

“In certain circumstances... the meanings of justice, injustice; good, bad; ethical, unethical... all these words lose their sanctity. Everything is fair in war and love. It is war now. It is nothing but war,” said Ravinder.

“Whatever you say... but I condemn the killing of Doctor Raghuveer Singh. I don’t find words to condemn this dastardly act,” said Paramanandam.

“In a war many innocent people die. Blood for blood; head for head; eye for eye; life for life. This is the morale of war. War is not the normal state of human family but it is the characteristic of barbarism. The wars by the people are more terrible than those by the kings. We kill because we are afraid of our own shadow. We may think that both of them are innocent. But in the police perspective the doctor had connections with the revolutionaries. Similarly the police considered that Jithender Reddy was doing his duty. He was implementing the orders of his superiors. If somebody wants to demolish a society, how can its wings of law

and order keep quiet? To save the society all its parts have to work in unison. You may call it a society or a state. For all this, the state Police department is an important wing. It does the job assigned to it. Policeman does his duty to earn his livelihood. Then killing a person who is doing his duty is also unjust. We also do our duty... we catch a student copying in examinations. He will be debarred for three years. If he attacks us in retaliation then how do you think about his action? ...just or unjust?" asked professor Ravinder.

"Yours is a frivolous argument. You are bringing two dissimilar things into comparison. It is our responsibility to be on the side of the people who sacrifice their lives to change this rotten and degenerated society. Otherwise history won't forgive us," said Paramanandam.

"But nowadays the only way to uplift the society is through democracy. There may be thousands of loopholes in democracy. But still it is the superior form of government because it is based on respect for man as a reasonable being. It is based on liberty, freedom and enfranchisement. Many forms of governments have been tried, and will be tried in this world of woe and poverty. Human dignity, economic independence, individual responsibility distinguish democracy from all other forms. There is no place for violence in democracy. If we fail to recognize it or do not teach it to our students then also history will not forgive us, Mister Paramanandam," said Ravinder.

Suddenly there was a big commotion outside.

All of them got up and looked outside through the windows. There was a police van and the policemen were marching towards the hostel. They started pulling out the students from the hostel rooms, beating them with batons and sticks and pushing them into the police van. Students were crying and running away in their casuals in all directions trying to escape from the police onslaught. Some students rushed into the Humanities building and entered the Sociology department.

“What happened? What happened?” the professors enquired the students.

“The Police raided our hostel, sir! They are searching our rooms and beating us. We have escaped and come here for shelter! Save us sir!” Seven or eight students scattered away from there to hide behind the cupboards, tables and some behind the professors.

“Arrest them! Apprehend these bastards! Don’t leave anybody!” A Sub-Inspector of Police along with four other reserve police constables entered the room. Their harsh voices and the ominous shoe sounds created panic among the fleeing students.

“What is this Inspector?” asked Paramanandam.

“It is war, my dear professor! It is war... kill... or... get killed! That is what happens in war, you know!?” said that sub-inspector.

“You are armed to teeth! How can it be a war with innocent unarmed students? Kindly vacate this place. As teachers it is our responsibility to protect our students,” said Paramanandam.

“Do you think they are the students? No! They are anti-social elements. Do you know about the plot to kill inspector Jithender Reddy was hatched in this hostel? Do you know about some of your professors’ involvement in this sinister plot? This is not a university, but a den for the revolutionaries,” said the Sub Inspector of Police in a harsh tone.

“Nonsense! Quite nonsense!?” said Professor Vidyasagar Reddy.

“Hold your tongue mister professor! We know what is sense and what is nonsense. We recovered the car the assailants had used for their escape. Can you guess who is the owner of the car? One of your professors who is also the chief warden of the students’ hostel. He is professor S.C. Bose... We wish to interrogate him. But you know that the great professor has absconded,” said the sub-inspector.

“You mean to say that car was given to them by professor Bose?”

“That is not our opinion. That car’s registration number points it that way. We have information that the miscreants who escaped by the car are the students of this hostel. We would like to interrogate every student of this hostel. Hand over them to us or else...” said the Sub Inspector of Police.

“No! No! You cannot do as you like! you have no permission to enter our campus. Have you taken the permission of the Vice-Chancellor?” asked Vidyasagar Reddy.

“You better ask your Vice- Chancellor about it. Come on Jawans! Arrest all of them,” said the sub-inspector.

“Nothing doing! You cannot arrest them.” Vidyasagar Reddy stood like a wall between the constables and the students. But they pushed him aside by force and he fell on the chair at his back.

“Mister Sagar! Please, stay away from them! Control yourself” said Paramanandam.

The police arrested all the students hiding in the staff room and marched them outside and pushed them into the police van.

“Why did you not resist them while they were whisking away our students?” questioned Vidyasagar Reddy.

“We have witnessed enough,” said Ravinder.

“If all of us had resisted, I think, we could have prevented the students from getting arrested. The police considered me as another student. And I am a junior most professor. If seniors like you... tomorrow’s Registrars and Vice Chancellors... had resisted, it would have made a difference,” said Vidyasagar Reddy.

“Whether its you or we... that would have been hardly made any difference. They just pushed you aside without using

the rifle butts. You can be happy for that. Already they were in a bad mood with the information they received. They suspected that one of us was in the thicket of the plot that made them behave like mad monkeys in a drunken spree,” said Paramanandam.

“Professor Paramanandam! You wished to kill the murderers of Doctor Raghuvver. But how come you had just let them go when they were right in front of you?” asked Vidyasagar Reddy.

“You had seen them how aggressive they were. Their uniforms and those menacing rifles made them look like predators on prowl,” said Vijayakumar.

“Do you think professor Bose has anything to do with the revolutionaries?” asked Ravinder.

“I don’t think so. I believe these students must have taken his car without his knowledge,” said Vidyasagar and he said again “my hats off to him, if he had helped them.”

“Why?” said Ravinder.

“He has done his duty for the success of the revolution. But we just talk... talk... talk...! When the time comes to show our mettle we just keep quiet. We are afraid of losing our dignity, our jobs, our money, our salaries and everything. We go crazy if we do it receive get our salary on the due date for just one month. We are mere cowards. I am proud of Mister Bose because at least he has guts and spine. Hats off to him!?” said Vidyasagar.

“It is your hat! That’s fine! But what about the other innocent students who are in the police custody and are tortured in the name of interrogation? What will happen to their parents and how much mental agony they undergo? Where will be an end to this violence and counter violence as well? And how many innocent people have to die in this conflagration before it subsides?” said Ravinder with deep concern.

“We have to bear this professor Ravinder, for the sake of revolution, for the birth of a new society, and a classless, an

egalitarian and a stateless society! A new society blossoms from blood but not from flowers. One has to break the egg to have an omlette. As Mao-Tse-Tung said, “Revolution is not a dinner party, not an essay, nor a painting, nor a piece of embroidery; it cannot be advanced softly, gradually, carefully, considerately, respectfully, politely, plainly and modestly.” But in the process of this revolution some innocent lives are bound to be lost.

Suffering is inevitable to some extent. The great battle of Kurukshetra was the war between the bad and the good. Lord Krishna himself fought on one side and purported violence. He advised to kill even the relatives of their own blood—brother, father, grandfather, or teacher—whoever they may be if they fight on enemy’s side! He himself encouraged some de-routes to win the war. Can you count how many innocent people lost their lives in that holy war? You have no sympathy for them, then why do you feel so sad about these rare incidents? This armed struggle is against injustice, prejudice, discrimination; a fight for the right; a battle to protect humanity. In that process some mistakes are inevitable. But the struggle must go on,” said Vidyasagar Reddy.

“You are young but wise... really I must appreciate you,” said Paramanandam.

The telephone was ringing.

Professor Paramanandam received the message. He said to others, “Our Vice-Chancellor has called for an emergency meeting. He wants all of us to attend it.”

“This time our university will be closed atleast for one month,” they said to one another. As expected in the emergency meeting a resolution was passed to close the university for one month.

4

Ravulapally is a village about fifty kilometres away from Vangala town. Many incidents occurred during the past twenty years in the village.

Agriculture was the main source of income of the people in those days and the crops grown by them were mainly millets, sorghum, maize and rice. The main source of water was from three or four fresh water ponds fed by only seasonal rains. Some landlords who owned dug up wells had animal powered systems of water supply (Mota) otherwise there was always a scenario of “no rain, so no grain”.

In 1970s, the Land Ceiling Act brought some changes but land reforms were successful only in some pockets of the island, as people had often found loopholes in the laws setting limits on the maximum area of land held by any person. The landlords either sold out their lands or transferred them to the names of their relatives. Some of these lands were purchased by the local and the outside farmers. Thus ‘Doras’ left the villages and settled in the nearby towns establishing their own business or industries. Their children migrated to America or England for their higher education and got settled there.

Electricity brought economic revolution in agriculture. Electric Motors brought up water from the deep wells and yield from agriculture became profitable. The farmers became less dependent on rains. Irrigation technology, pest control, fertilizers paved way for the Green Revolution which also made small farmers shift their cultivation from growing traditional cereals to commercial crops like cotton, chillies, tobacco and turmeric. Famine, which was a recurrent feature in the past had become a distant memory since them.

Education sector also showed leaps and bounds. The affordability for school and higher education which was once limited only to the children of landlords in those days was then reachable to others. People shifted from traditional caste based occupations to the jobs based on education. They overcame the barriers of caste and many of them became school teachers, bus-conductors, office clerks and so on. The traditional ways of life in the villages were gradually changed into modern means of livelihood.

Another change that occurred was in the political system. Panchaayati Raj was a system of governance in which gram panchayats (“Gram Swaraj,” Village Self-Governance) were the basic units of administration. It had three levels: village, block and district. The 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj was for all the states having population of over 2 millions. It was meant to hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years, to provide reservation of seats for the people belonging to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and the reservation for Women, to appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations regarding the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute District Planning Committee to prepare developmental plan for the district. So, people became politically conscious of their rights and this led to the group politics which soon entered the villages. People started identifying with one party or the other and soon the differences in political ideology and personalities divided the people into groups. The clashes between groups over petty issues made village atmosphere much volatile and caustic.

Many agriculture workers who traditionally worked as employees under village landlords for petty gains changed their working pattern to that of daily labourers. As the remuneration and respect was high, their number got multiplied and they became conscious of their rights and privileges. They started aligning with the one or the other political party.

* * * *

The primary school is the meeting place for the teachers and local literates of Ravulapally village. Politically conscious or otherwise, people whenever they find some time they get together and discuss various issues ranging from local love affairs to world of politics. Usually local politics have the *locus standee* in most of the discussions.

“This time it is not at all a cake walk for Murahari Rao,” said Eswaraiah the school headmaster.

“I do not agree. He will win ‘hands down’ this time also,” said Someshwar an unemployed graduate.

“It’s my bet!” said Shankaraiah one of the teachers.

“I am ready! I bet a hundred undred rupees.?” said Someshwar.

“Why do you lose unnecessarily a hundred rupees?... the situation is quite advantageous to that young man Veeraswamy. All the youth in the village are against Murahari Rao,” said Shankaraiah.

“What can those inexperienced young unemployed amateurs do? Murahari Rao is a pro. Before him, they are mere blades of grass hit by tornado,” said Someshwar.

“Don’t take this issue very easy. These young men have been educated in towns and are aware of the world political scenario. Veeraswamy may represent them in the ensuing elections for the post of Sarpanch,” said Shankaraiah.

“Yes. Don’t underestimate them. They have started their election campaign at every door step and meeting everyone in person. They may offer tough fight to Murahari Rao,” said Venkataiah, a non-local man who procures paddy by purchasing from the farmers in the village.

“Veeraswamy is the boy who belongs to a backward class community. He has completed his intermediate recently, hasn’t he?” the head master enquired.

“Yes! Yes! He is the same guy. Very strong personality! Soon he will take over this village,” said Shankaraiah.

“How will you be so sure of it ? If that is so what do you think about the old man, Murahari Rao, in politics will do? will he keep quiet and silent? It’s Impossible,” said Someshwar.

“What can he do? Time is bad for him. People are vexed of his attitude. Veeraswamy is man of words and worldly wisdom.

His words are creating new hopes among poor people. He promises people a new society based on equality, fraternity and liberty; a government to be formed by the working class. He wants to destroy the role of the petty bourgeoisie, petty capitalist and petty middlemen in society. The poor may help one another but how can people like Murahari Rao, a 'Dora' help the poor? Give the youth a chance to establish people's government. These are the issues that are always raised by him which also stir the hearts of people. He just mesmerizes them," said Shankaraiah.

"But you have to accept the fact that Murahari Rao has also played his role in developing the village," said Someshwar.

"Which development?" asked Shankaraiah.

"We have got electricity, roads, road transport buses, co-operative bank, and other things only because of his hard work. Many poor people to procure loans from the banks, registration pass books of land from the government, establishing housing colonies—all these developmental works and services are possible now only because of his relentless work," said Someshwar.

"Such development is everywhere! Our village also has got such facilities. But I don't find any great contribution from Murahari Rao," said Shankaraiah.

"He is not corrupt," said Someshwar.

"That is what others also say. But to me he seems to be very clever who makes others believe that his hands are clean," said Shankaraiah. "Everyone is honest until he is proved otherwise."

This conversation had continued till the ringing of the last bell at around 5 'o' clock in the evening.

This primary school has six teacher posts but only four are filled up. Two of them belong to the same village. The other two come from Kothapet village which is five kilometres away from Ravulapally. The teachers in the village have other small

businesses like doing agriculture, looking after shops, taking private tuitions to students, and the most important one is participating in village politics. And they are the main advisers to the local politicians.

Their style naturally creates jealousy among the local bigwigs. Narayana Rao, a local landlord is always at the forefront in criticizing them. “You know these teachers are the luckiest chaps. Salary on one hand, income from agriculture on the other hand... apart from regular increments, dearness allowances, new pay scale revisions... Oh money...! and money! But tell me! Are they doing their job sincerely? Where is the teaching schedule? Who is teaching properly? Always they discuss the nonsense of the world... politics... If we criticise them, then they will go on strike.

If we transfer them to other places they will return in a few days by using the influence of any one of the local leaders. Now they are earning pretty good amount as salaries. What about our farmers? Our income never increases even as a sheep’s tail. Very bad...!”

* * * *

Panchayath board elections have arrived. The village is full of young men between the age group of 18 and 20 years. They belong to the socially and economically backward and scheduled classes, and they are now campaigning for Veeraswamy panel. May be it is the first time in the village history that the people from the oppressed groups are participating in the electoral process with such vigour.

“All these years we were ruled by the rich people. This time please give a chance to the candidate from the poor. Ensure victory for the poor people’s party. Murahari Rao belongs to the rich class. He may be good but his party members, and his followers are not. They help their own people. They just throw some leftovers on our face. They try to buy you with money and liquor. Please don’t sell your vote. Cast your vote to the panel led

by Veeraswamy who is very keen and interested in achieving the real village government. That will be the people's government which solves the problem of poverty. Our village will become a heaven," thus they talked to the people. They painted the village walls with slogans. The whole village was gripped with election fever.

But Murahari Rao was found no where in the campaign. He maintained somewhat a low profile till the date of elections was announced. Just two or three days before the polling date, his followers started canvassing in a devastating style. Country made cheap liquor and liquor packets were flowed in streams into every house on the day before the polling date. Some voters were lured with cash and kind. Polling went off peacefully. Results were announced. Murahari Rao's panel won the hands down. Seven wards went in favour of Murahari Rao whereas Veeraswamy's panel had three, including his own. Murahari Rao retained his post and became Sarpanch again.

This defeat had a great impact on Veeraswamy. His hopes of starting a peoples' government in his village were evaporated in the beginning itself. People, he thought, understood him and his ideology. But why this *volte face*? What happened to the promises made by the oppressed people to him? Why did they vote for Murahari Rao?

It all happened just in one night, the night before the election day! People sold their vote and integrity for money and liquor. Murahari Rao used the Machiavelli's technique.

Whose mistake is this?

"Mine! Yes. I made a mistake," thought Veeraswamy.

He remembered Ajay Kumar. He always called this election process as farce and fake. He was sure that the chances of winning the elections are there only for the rich. Veeraswamy became an ardent listener and admirer of Ajay Kumar whose father sacrificed his life during the armed struggle in 1940s. His mother was

imprisoned for the same cause. Now his brothers are also in the present revolutionary movement.

Ajay Kumar expressed his views about the elections to Veeraswamy in a casual pre-election meeting. He said to Veeraswamy “Don’t believe in these elections. They are fake and not trustworthy. Don’t believe these people. They are gullible! This entire election process helps only the rich to be in power. These people are like chaff in the open that follows the wind.

Do you think that Murahari Rao is going to keep quiet and let you win the elections? He depends on money and muscle power. He will use them at the appropriate moment to steal your votes. Never imagine that these elections will be held free and fair. The only way to the poor to gain power is through the barrel of a gun.”

At that time he contradicted every idea of Ajay Kumar. He condemned violence. He vociferously argued with his friend about the dark side of the revolutionary path. How can you fight an enemy whose power is hundred times better than that of your own?

Ajay Kumar did not budge. He said with confidence, “People are our strength. When they are on our side, we can easily defeat our enemy how much strong he may be. Take the example of Vietnam! They made the giant America run for life!”

Veeraswamy understood the truth.

He noticed the fickleness of many people.

He participated in the panchayat board meetings as the opposition leader. He was very constructive in his criticism. But there was least regard for his suggestions. Even his friends and followers started deserting him. The village politics again moved around Murahari Rao.

Money and muscle power, he saw, dominating the ideology and ideals.

He understood the dubious ways of the rich to retain the power

He realized the hollowness of the democratic process.

He understood the importance of equality and liberty often discussed by Ajay Kumar

Veeraswamy was a natural orator. Ajay Kumar always encouraged him to represent the issues related to the students with the principal and management during his college days. Veeraswamy tried to maintain some distance from Ajay Kumar after knowing his contacts with the underground revolutionaries. But Ajay Kumar succeeded in maintaining their friendship alive.

Veeraswamy got through his intermediate examination with a mere pass. He appeared for the entrance examination for admission into the teacher training course. Awaiting the results he stayed in his village and observed the political and economic conditions that prevailed in the village. Soon he was surrounded by other young men of progressive ideology. They noticed the discrepancies in the development of the village. Except some upper caste people, the other people were living in absolute poverty. More than one third of the people were illiterate. There were no medical facilities available in the village. The poor were living in deplorable conditions. There was no protected water supply. Scheduled caste people were living outside village as the untouchables. Cholera and malaria were the regular visitors. No immunization facilities were available. Infant mortality was high. People still believed in ghosts, black magic and voodoo. Untouchability was still practiced by some upper class people. Then where was the so called development brought about as promised by Murahari Rao?

Elections arrived.

Veeraswamy represented the youth.

Not only his friends, he himself was also sure of his own victory.

Everybody worked hard with enthusiasm.

But only one night there was a complete change in the whole situation.

Money and liquor triumphed over hope and ideology.

Veeraswamy was terribly disturbed. To him the world seemed to be gloomy for ever.

One night, Ajay Kumar met Veeraswamy.

They discussed many issues.

Again after a week Ajay Kumar and Veeraswamy sat together for a whole night.

Early in the morning when dawn's rosy fingers touched the sky, Veeraswamy took leave of his parents and left the village along with Ajay Kumar.

After a few days there was a rumour in the village about Veeraswamy that he had gone into exile to join and work with the revolutionaries.

5

The news that Veeraswamy joined the revolutionaries spread like wild fire in the village of Ravulapally. It evoked mixed feelings among the villagers. People knew very well about the consequences that one had to face if some one joined the revolutionaries and the repercussions that they have to face from the authorities and the police. Because this was the experience of the other villagers nearby. So far Ravulapally was away from the activities of the revolutionaries. Now it is certain that this village is also going to be the play ground for the activities of both the revolutionaries and the police. The very thought made them shiver.

About six months passed.

Meanwhile Murali and Kanakaiah, the two close friends of Veeraswamy also followed his footsteps into the forest. People

began whispering with one another about the role of Veeraswamy alias Vikram who had already become a squad leader of the armed revolutionaries. And they had established a base in the nearby forest.

One day the village woke up before sunrise with the rumours that Veeraswamy and his squad entered the village at midnight and planted red flags in the fields belonged to the landlords. Then everybody became alert and worried about the consequences that were usually followed by such acts of the revolutionaries.

The landlords who were affected approached Murahari Rao. They looked pale with fear and anxiety.

“This is improper and unjust. How can they consider me a landlord when I have only ten acres to till? I lost all my lands by the Land Ceiling Act. Now I am left with only ten acres. Where can I go if I am not allowed to till it?” said Somi Reddy.

Once upon a time Somi Reddy had a hundred acres of land. However, during enactment of the Land Ceiling Act, he either sold it out or transferred it on somebody’s (binami) name. He was the biggest landlord at that time.

“What about me? What do I own? All the pieces of my land put together become just twelve acres and I have three sons. Each one gets four acres. They placed red flags in my lands. What can I do?” said Ramaswamy.

Ramaswamy came to live with his ins-law after the marriage. As a shrewd farmer he disposed his property in his village and purchased lands in his wife’s village and made their assets doubled. He also introduced commercial crops such as cotton, turmeric, tobacco, chilly and peanut and got prospered well. Other farmers followed him.

“What about our Sarpanch? He himself has surrendered twenty acres of prime land to the government. Who else has done

that, tell me? They placed red flags in his lands also. Now, he has less than ten acres with him,” said Venkataiah.

Venkataiah and Sarpanch Murahari Rao have lands at one place. Both are neighbours. He is also popular as one of the landlords in that village.

“Where will you find such a selfless man, who works day and night for the development of our village? If he is in trouble, who else will be free from the threat of the revolutionaries? Now this village is no more a place for the hard workers and prosperous people. We have to leave this place and go to the town,” said Somi Reddy.

“Murahari Rao, sir! Is this your opinion particularly when you are supposed to guide us in the midst of this crisis?” said Venkataiah.

Murahari Rao was silent while all these people were complaining.

“What can I say? I have been expecting these consequences ever since the time of our election.

It would have been good for the village if Veeraswamy was elected unanimously. In spite of my reluctance you all forced me to contest the elections. We won the election battle but lost the future war!?” said Murahari Rao.

“In this village, people accept only you as their Sarpanch. If you had not contested people would have thought you left the arena because of fear,” said Venkataiah.

I’m not afraid of anybody. But when a young man so enthusiastically came forward to serve the village, I thought it would be appropriate to give him a chance and let him learn the problems at first hand. But you did not heed my advice then,” said Murahari Rao.

“What ever happened is happened. What shall we do now? Let us think about that,” said Somi Reddy.

“As far as I know, nobody in this village has not much more land than what the Land Ceiling Act has permitted. Why should we fear? Don’t care those flags. We’ll continue our work as usual,” replied Murahari Rao.

“When you know the consequences well, how can you advise us like that? Can anybody step in to those lands where the revolutionaries have planted red flags and see the day light again?” said Somi Reddy.

“Come on! How many people do they kill? Let us face that situation,” said Murahari Rao.

“May be you have no fear, but what about us? I personally do not venture into that land again,” said Venkataiah.

“Sarpanch *saab*! For a while you also forget about those lands. Go and spend a holiday with your children in America, and come back when this nuisance is over” suggested Somi Reddy.

“I don’t want to go anywhere leaving my village. Why are you worried so much? Let us invite those people who placed flags in our lands and present our arguments to them. If we have any surplus land beyond the ceiling limit, we shall agree to abide by their decision,” said Murahari Rao.

“Sir, you are an old gentleman! Pardon me. Why do they listen to our words? Don’t they know how much land we have? They have this grudge because we are prosperous,” said Somi Reddy.

“What do they gain by occupying our lands? If we let our lands into their hands then who is going to till them? Even then if the land is distributed to some downtrodden low caste people, are they dare enough to enter these lands to cultivate them? Do the police keep quiet? Then what happens? The land becomes barren. Why don’t they understand this issue?” argued Murahari Rao.

“They know it. Barren land increases poverty further more. If there is more poverty, it will be more advantage to them. Poverty is the father of revolution, isn’t it?” added Somi Reddy

“Revolution... my foot! That is all politics. Dark politics,” said Venkataiah.

“Then, what is our course of action?” asked Yadagiri who was silent till then. Yadagiri has retail paddy-business apart from agriculture.

“No change in my stance. I don’t leave my land and go elsewhere. Whether it is they like it or not, I continue my work as usual. Let what may happen! Whether it is my life or death, it must be in my village itself. I cannot run away from this place like a coward,” said Murahari Rao with firm tone.

“Can’t you change your decision?” said Somi Reddy

“Last time I accepted your advice to contest and as a result, all this misfortune fell upon this village. Now I have taken my own decision” replied Murahari Rao not yielding.

“That is up to you. I claim no more for that land. Tomorrow I may even leave this village and go to the city to stay with my son,” said Somi Reddy.

“I stay here, but I don’t even look at those lands,” said Venkataiah.

“Me too,” said Yadagiri; Ramaswamy followed suit.

“It’s my final request. Please, don’t step into those cursed lands” again requested Somi Reddy.

“We are also of the same opinion. Why do you want to stay here? Go and stay with your sons and be happy” endorsed Venkataiah.

“My children made a big mistake by leaving this country and staying in a foreign land. Now how can I repeat the same mistake? My conscience won’t permit me to do so. You don’t have to worry about my safety. God is there. He can look after me. We will do whatever we think right. He will take care of the rest,” said Murahari Rao philosophically.

“Then, only God can save you. You know quite well that you are playing with fire,” warned Venkataiah.

“I never had any dealings with them. We have been farmers for generations till now. How can they now order me not to do that? If the land is not there what is there that I can do? There must be a rule or procedure for each and everything. A Law, or an Act. There is ceiling. Surrender the surplus land,’ they said. I obliged immediately. If they want they may even verify the records. You want to pass a law that nobody should own a piece of land, contest the elections, win them, and amend the law, if somebody goes against that, throw them in the jail,” said Murahari Rao.

“They don’t have trust in these elections and you know about it very well. They wish to establish their government through the barrel of the gun only, but not by the ballet,” said Somi Reddy.

“OK. Let them do whatever they like. Let them establish the government by the barrel of the gun only. Let them bring in new acts and laws. Take over all the lands. But there should be uniformity. You prove your might in one or two districts where you have some strength. You will be totally silent in other districts. Why do you bother about the farmers of Trilinga Island only? there are millionaires in other islands. Why don’t you think about them? Already this Trilinga Island is in a backward state being plundered and pillaged for centuries by many rulers. Now they are adding a new dimension to it,” said Murahari Rao.

“Do you think that you can convince them with this kind of argument with them? They consider this as a frivolous argument. Nobody can convince them, even the Lord Brahma,” said Somi Reddy.

“Why the Lord Brahma, Somi Reddy! I will convince them. I will go wherever they want me for talks. I’ll answer them. I’ll meet them in their den and ask for the clarification about this revolution which is just limited to two districts alone and how they are going to sustain it? I haven’t committed any mistake.

Then why should I be afraid of? Death is certain. If not today at least tomorrow,” said Murahari Rao quietly.

“How can we tell you, when you are so determined?” said Somi Reddy while taking leave of Murahari Rao. Others followed him.

* * * *

All other lands except those of Murahari Rao in which revolutionaries planted red flags turned barren for there was no tilling at all. Nobody ventured to enter those lands except the cattle grazing grass in the fields.

It is in the grape garden of the village that Veeraswamy instructed some of the landless people to till the lands where they planted red flags. But they did not dare to do so because of the fear of the police.

Two months passed without any notable incident.

One day at mid night the village woke up in a sudden fright.

Veeraswamy conducted a peoples’ court in that village in front of the panchayath board office with his squad members. They called for Murahari Rao. Many people who included young, old and women alike, were already present there.

In that group were five armed revolutionaries in olive green uniforms. The villagers recognized Veeraswamy. When Murahari Rao came, Veeraswamy threw a sharp glance at him and then looked at the people gathered there.

“How are you Veeraswamy?” greeted Murahari Rao.

“Let us put aside such formalities. Do you know why you are called here?” said Veeraswamy.

“No. Will you, please, tell me,” said Murahari Rao.

“This must be the first time for someone to order you to attend a meeting in this manner,” said Veeraswamy.

“No. It’s not true.”

“You have ruled this village like a king all these ten years. You have conducted many courts.

Why do you again till those lands When people have taken over your surplus lands?

This will be viewed as the contempt of the people’s court and shall be dealt with accordingly. You can present your arguments now,” said Veeraswamy.

“May I know what evidence you have that I have surplus land? I have only that much land left with me which is permitted by the Land Ceiling Act. I am ready to accept any type of punishment if I have even a single foot of excess land in my possession,” said Murahari Rao.

“We don’t recognize the acts of this false, semi bourgeois, semi capitalistic government of yours. The land is not anybody’s property. It belongs to the people,” said Veeraswamy.

“If that is so, take over every body’s lands and for that matter the land of entire country. Why do you harass small farmers like me, only in these two districts?”

“You need not worry about it. Such days will also come very soon. Nobody can stop this revolution. It is as natural as the rise of the sun and flow of the wind. There is no rule that revolution must start or come all over the world at a time. Today! Now! Here! And at this moment! This revolution is a fact. You cannot deny that. You must leave the land where we have placed our red flags. Otherwise...”warned Veeraswamy.

“I have only ten acres of land of which only five acres are useful for agriculture.

But you have placed your flags in that land. If that is not there how can I and my wife survive?” said Murahari Rao.

“Don’t act and try to be so innocent? You are not poor. Everybody knows it. Won’t your children in America take care of you?”

“As long as I am alive, I will never depend on anyone,” said Murahari Rao.

“What happened to that entire amount you accumulated during your regime? Don’t act too smart?”

“If you prove it, then I shall hang myself here to death. I have given away my property to people but not vice versa,” said Murahari Rao.

“Murahari Rao has looked after us well. We have our houses built only in his land as of now. So far he has been fair and righteous towards us,” said an old Dalit among the gathering.

“We know how much good he has done to this village. We know how much land he has retained with himself and how much he has given to the people. He is a honey laden knife. Water under the mat! A fox in the sheep’s disguise! He is a very good actor. He secretly plundered your wealth and he made you believe that he helped you. He is more dangerous than the day light robberers. Didn’t you observe in the previous elections how many atrocities he had committed?” said Veeraswamy.

“May be I am responsible to some extent for those incidents. Initially I was reluctant to contest in the elections. I had to file nomination by abiding the party discipline. I was sure that the good deeds of mine would help me in winning the election. But some of my party activists, without my knowledge distributed liquor packets and money. I am morally responsible for that. On that basis if you want me to resign my post I have no objection to do so.”

“Listen to him! Now he wants to resign. If you were so honest why did you not resign then and there itself? See, Mr. Murahari Rao! The great man of goodness personified! We don’t want to waste our time arguing with you. This is our last warning.

If you touch those lands again they you have to face dire, the consequences,” saying so Veeraswamy and his followers left that place with slogans piercing the dark night.

Revolution zindabad!

Down, down! This semi capitalistic, semi feudalistic, semi bourgeoisie state!

Down, down police brutality!

Down, down the atrocities of the landlords!

Revolution zindabad!

* * * *

Even after that incident Murahari Rao continued his routine as usual. He continued to visit the land claimed by the revolutionaries. People were astonished at his fearlessness.

After a week, one day in the early morning a battalion of special police surrounded the village and apprehended many youth. They raided Veeraswamy's house and forced his parents to tell them the whereabouts of their son. They beat them with rifle butts, pulled out Veeraswamy's mother by her hair, and threatened to shoot her. They demolished their thatched hut and put it on fire. Having lost all the provisions they had, the old couple wept till their eyes got dried up. Nobody came to their rescue. Nobody dared to stop the police. Before leaving the village they held a meeting with all the people of the village at the Gram Panchayat office.

Gangaram, the Circle Inspector of Police spoke, “It seems that some people belonging to revolutionary parties planted red flags in the lands here. Those lands are to be cultivated by the land owners only. If other persons occupy those lands then they will be arrested and sent to jail. If anybody offers shelter to those revolutionaries, they will be dealt with seriously. Your fate will be same as that of the parents of Veeraswamy alias Vikram. Don't allow them even to reach your village boundaries. They can be of

no help to you. Whatever be your grievances, you may represent them to the government through proper channel. You can report to us in case of any atrocities on you or injustice meted out to you by anyone. We will see that justice is done.

But if anybody goes against the law, whoever they may be, we don't spare them.

If anybody takes law into their hands also ... the consequences will be very bad.

Mind that! Take the ideal of your Sarpanch Murahari Rao. He has not cared the warnings of the so called revolutionaries. This country needs people like him. To protect these courageous and law abiding people, we are always there at the forefront..."

After completing his speech the inspector along with his troop left the village.

Soon after the departure of the police, people gathered around Veeraswamy's house. They tried to console the unfortunate old couple.

"This is wrong. If they have guts, it would have been proper to deal with Veeraswamy, not with his aged parents," said some of them.

"The police said that they will protect the law abiding people. Whom will they protect?"

We have seen how they have behaved with these old people. They have burnt down their house and beat them to pulp, and claimed that they are for the people," said Shankaraiah, a teacher by profession.

"This is very bad time for this village. This reminds me of the attacks by Rajakars of the yester years. Our lives being are crushed between the revolutionaries and the police," bemoaned an old gentleman.

After a while Murahari Rao also came. He sat beside Veeraswamy's father. The old man wept a lot. "Maybe, we are not allowed to live in this village, Sarpanch *saab*!" cried he.

"We both have the same problem of survival, in this village," said Murahari Rao.

"I told my son not to contest the elections. But he did not heed my advice. He lost the election. Then he joined the revolutionaries. Occupied these lands by placing the flags!... This has happened since then... What can I do? Where can I go?" again the oldman was in tears.

"My situation is similar to you, Bhoomaiah! I refused to contest the elections. I wished to give a chance to the youth. But our party forced me to contest. Otherwise Veeraswamy would have been the unanimous choice as our village Sarpanch. What can we do? It is not in our hands. It is all predetermined. Whatever the Almighty decides above is experienced here by us. We are just puppets in his hands. We have to perform our duty leaving the rest in His hands," said Murahari Rao.

"You mean to say that without your knowledge police entered this village! You have whatever you can do behind all of us and now you are trying to be innocent" said Gopal, a young man who previously worked with Veeraswamy during elections, protesting seriously.

"I promise you in the name of lord Srikrishna the god I believe that I have no knowledge of police coming to our village" said Murahari Rao.

"What ever happened is happened. You don't stay in this village any more Sarpanch *saab*! Go to the city like Somi Reddy," advised one dalit old man.

"I can't! This is my village. I was born and grown up here. My parents and their parents including my past generations were born here and died here. I wish my remains too get into this village soil. My sons left this land and went to far away places. Now I am

the last link between this village and the dynasty of my family. I promised my father to stay in this village looking after our lands till my last breath,” said Murahari Rao. People gathered there looked at one another with surprise by his confession.

“Bhoomaiah! Don’t worry about your house...you can stay in my house if you want,” said Murahari Rao.

“Don’t worry about him, sir! They are not accustomed to stay in rich houses like that of yours. We shall take care of them,” said Gopal.

Murahari Rao got up to leave.

Everybody who gathered there began to disperse.

“Sooner or later Veeraswamy will strike again. This man’s days are over,” the words were heard among the crowd.

* * * *

Another month passed.

One day by early morning there were wall posters pasted everywhere in the village.

“Murahari Rao is responsible for the police brutality and he is the one who supports the landlords, and he has betrayed the people by working as an informer to the police. Unless he changes his attitude he will be punished in the people’s court. This is the last warning...” this was the content of those wall-posters.

Murahari Rao had also gone through these posters. His face was blushed red with full of emotions. When he reached home his wife Savithramma was there waiting anxiously for him.

“Is it true that are were wall-posters against you?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“At least now, consider my suggestion.”

“You want us to leave the village, won’t you?”

“Yes... I beg you. I request you. Let’s go to the town first and later we’ll go to America and stay there with our sons,”

“You may go if you wish.” But I will never leave this village. I cannot stay away from this land, this air and these people.”

“How can I go without you? Why are you so stubborn like this? Why don’t you understand that there is a threat to your life? “Is there anything more precious than one’s life in this world?”

“This village, these people, and my native land... I love to live here and die here only. Even if I am killed here; I have the satisfaction of dying in my native land.”

“Don’t leave me alone if you were to leave this world for ever. You take me along with you.”

“Who is to go and who is to stay will be decided by the God above. There is nothing in my hands.”

“Why this obstinacy? Why should you stay in the village even after the appearance of the posters against you? What have we got from this village? Whatever you have done to this village is recognised by none. Further, they have branded you as a betrayer. This kind of affection towards this village is quite meaningless.”

“I’ll ask them how I have become a people’s betrayer. I’ll ask the people. I’ll call for a meeting and place this matter in the hands of the people.”

“Nobody will attend your meeting. You have to explain your version to the trees and walls there.”

“All right! Let it happen that way.”

“Whoever were prosperous in this village, all of them went to the city and got settled there. But, it is only you who stayed back. For that, do you find anybody appreciating you? Everybody advises you to leave the village for your own good.”

“Let them say whatever they want. I won’t go anywhere. I will ask the people what mistake I have committed.” They argued with each other in that manner for a long time. Unable to make him change his decision, she finally stopped the conversation.

After two or three days Murahari Rao brought some pamphlets from the city and distributed them to the people in the village personally going from door to door. The pamphlet was written and published by Murahari Rao.

“Have I Betrayed the People?” was the title of the pamphlet. It contained his explanation about the service he had done all these years. The facilities like electricity, bus service, protected water supply, establishment of the co-operative bank, upgradation of the primary school, all these were established during his term only. He himself voluntarily handed over the excess land in his possession to the government. Then how can he be branded as the betrayer of people?” he asked.

This issue of distribution of the pamphlets by Murahari Rao was also covered extensively by the local press. Some newspapers published the whole text of it. The people in that village were silent and nobody talked about it either in its favour or against.

His close friends were unanimous that this pamphlet generates more enmity instead of sorting out the differences. “You are playing with fire,” they warned him.

But Murahari Rao was firm in his stance. He started asking each and everybody, How has he betrayed the people?

How can he become a betrayer after doing so much service to the village. He was obsessed with this kind of enquiry and this made people conclude that he had gone insane.

Meanwhile the police established a police picket in that village. Everybody thought that it was meant to protect Murahari Rao only. Though Murahari Rao objected to it, the police politely rejected his request to remove the picket post.

Murahari Rao's sons called him on phone and requested him to leave the village immediately and come to America. "At least for the sake of our mother," they pleaded with him. But he was adamant. Instead, he blamed them for migrating to another country leaving the motherland. He said he had no objection to send their mother to them. He expressed his doubt they would ever visit the village even in the event of his death. Unable to persuade him to come to America, they argued no further.

Murahari Rao did not cease to go to his lands in the early morning everyday. Even the police advised him not to go. But he continued his routine despite repeated warnings to him.

One day, some people found his dead body in his own fields beside a small canal. The entire piece of wet land was filled with Blood oozed from his chopped head. The scene was so terrible. His wish that "his blood should flow only on his land was at last fulfilled this way," commented many villages.

A letter was found beside the dead body. It was in red letters. "This murder is in retaliation to the establishment of police picket in the village, for harassing the innocent people, and for not heeding the warnings given by them" was the content of the letter.

Murahari Rao's murder created panic in and out of the surrounding villages.

His funeral was attended by people in large number. Many voiced their opinions.

Some felt that his confrontation with revolutionaries was not necessary.

He should have left those lands marked by the revolutionaries.

"The prolonged arguments, the useless pamphlets, the media coverage all these things brought about his peril," said some people.

“It is all due to Veeraswamy’s grudge against him over his defeat in the elections.”

“It is not fair to kill such a person who served people all his life.”

Revolutionaries unnecessarily kill no body. They think a lot before they take any drastic action. This would not have happened if he were to choose to settle in the city”

“Why city? Who stopped him from going to America? One has to utilize the chance one gets. His fate is like that. What can one do?

“If everybody decides to go to America, who will remain in this country? Murahari Rao is a patriot. He is attached to this village, these lands and the people here. He did not leave this village even though there was a threat to his life. It is his greatness, isn’t it?

“May be you are right. But he lost his life.”

“Many people die everyday. But dying... for a cause... for a word... for a belief... that’s what makes the difference. And he stood up for what he believed in till the end. That his its greatness.”

Thus people expressed their different opinions. Some of them wept openly.

“There he is. Born here and died here. He wished that his blood be mixed with the soil here and that had truly happened.” That way, justice had been done to him. Some cried as tears rolling from their eyes.

The leaders of many political parties, ministers including the chief minister, attended his funeral and condoled his death.

Civil liberties and human rights watch groups, press, intellectuals, poets, writers all gave statements in the newspapers from their own point of view.

“There is no place for violence in democracy and all these problems have to be solved by peaceful means only,” many politicians gave such statements.

“Violence begets violence. As long as this government allows fake encounters, there will be more counter killings in retaliation. If this problem is viewed only as the disturbance to peace and security then there is no solution. Therefore, the government has to review its stance and strategy,” opined the leftists and leaders of the human rights groups.

“It is the most heinous and meaningless act committed by the retarded people, who killed a patriot and a good person like Murahari Rao, and this reflects their low level at which their revolutionary movement has reached at present. They are now no more revolutionaries but the dreaded mafia gangsters. People one day retaliate against them and that day is not too far,” criticized some senior police officials.

“The wrath of the people against the betrayers will be like this only and by eliminating Murahari Rao, a wolf in a sheep’s skin, people are now just one step next to the revolution, and soon in the island of Trilinga, the establishment of people’s state will be a reality and a new socialist society will be a certainty and a dream come true” giving such statements, some revolutionary poets wrote victory songs.

“By killing a Gandhian like Murahari Rao the fanatics killed Mahatma Gandhi one more time. Our government is closely observing the atrocities committed by the militants. Very soon we see that this problem is resolved once and for all.” the Chief Minister gave his statement in a serious tone.

“The government is a total failure in its maintenance of the law and order. Better it should resign by accepting the moral responsibility,” the leader of the opposition party demanded.

Some news magazines have published editorials about Murahari Rao’s murder claiming that he is a true Gandhian,

patriot and a believer in democratic principles. What is his mistake? Being born in a landlord's family is not a crime. These so called revolutionaries better shun the violence and join the mainstream.

Other magazines have published a list of crimes supposed to be committed by Murahari Rao.

Public memory is short.

After a few days, everybody forgot everything about Murahari Rao. His sons took their mother and sister along with them to America. The lands of Murahari Rao turned barren there was none to claim them. Nobody dared to enter those jinxed lands.

It is *vox populi* that Veeraswamy became one of the top leaders in the revolutionary party, and that his name itself created terror in the hearts of the betrayers of people of that area. The state had fixed a price of two lakh rupees over his head.

6

Anantharam is a nearby village of Ravulapally. It is bigger than Ravulapally. Two fresh water lakes of Kakatiya dynasty are the major sources of irrigation. If these lakes are full of water then the lands of the village yield two seasonal crops. Many of the farmers have deep wells in their fields now. The dawn of electricity has changed the face of the village. The wells are now fitted with electric motors, and many farmers have started adopting modern methods of agriculture. Several farmers from other places arrived there and became settlers. Government also sanctioned many schemes to that village in a move to eradicate poverty. As a result, now Anantharam is one of the well developed villages in that area. The village has a middle school but now upgraded to a high school.

In the centre of that village is the house of Mutyam Rao which is always busy with visitors. From the days of panchayat raj, Mutyam Rao is the Sarpanch. On that day also Mutyam Rao's house is very busy. In that early morning one could see the important people of that village gathered there to hear the first

hand information about the happenings in the town and the world from Mutyam Rao himself. He came back from the town only the night before. And these days he is spending more time in the town than in his village. Mutyam Rao was seen completing his morning ablutions

He is around fifty with an impressive personality, fair complexion, oval shaped face, wide forehead, big eyes, long nose, stylishly combed hair. He was in his morning dress and began his conversation with the waiting audience.

There are two official gunmen for his security. One is standing nearby. The other one is at the main door keeping an eye on the by passers by both the gunmen are in their prime youth and are six feet tall with good physic. Their probing eyes, dark and strong muscular bodies and their poise with menace looking guns is creating fear and awe among the onlookers. Their fathers are working as police constables and this has made their entry into the Police department very easy and simple as well.

Mutyam Rao tidied himself and occupied the easychair among the waiting audience. His servant Beekya served morning tea to all of them who were assembled there.

“You stayed in the town for ten days this time sir, tell us the news and anything noteworthy there?” enquired Rajaiah Goud.

Rajaiah Goud is around thirty years old. He is dark and lean but very sharp. Having failed in intermediate exam, he has realized that education is not his forte, so he has taken up his father’s business and expanded it into an empire. His father Rama swamy is a freedom fighter’s pension holder. It seems that he went to jail for waging war against Nizam’s rule. He was a member of communist party in those days. With the amount of that pension he started paddy business.

In those days farmers used to take the agriculture produce to the town grain market which was never farmer friendly. Ramaswamy assured the farmers by paying the market price in

the village itself and began to advance money to serve their needs even before the harvest. Thus his business gradually picked up. His sincerity in payments brought farmers from the other villages too into his fold. He became very prosperous in a short time. His eldest son Rajaiah then took the control of the business giving his father his well deserved rest.

Apart from this business Rajaiah started a big kirana and general stores where he made available all the items required by the village people so that they need not go to the town. Its impact was so much that the small scale traditional merchants of the village (Baniyas, as they were called) had to close down their shops and leave.

Later he purchased a tractor and opened a wine shop and he added a suffix 'Goud' to his name, so to be called Rajaiah Goud. His brother Veeraiah too gave up his education after intermediate and joined his brother in expanding their business.

Mutyam Rao and Rajaiah Goud became very good friends. The monetary help offered by Rajaiah, during elections was repaid always in kind by Mutyam Rao. In the previous elections Rajaiah became a village ward member and Mutyam Rao made him the village deputy Sarpanch. Many people began to refer to him as the future Sarpanch, and Rajaiah Goud too secretly nursed the same ambition in his mind. The village people equate their friendship with Krishna and Arjuna, the famous duo of the epic Mahabharatha.

Another notable one in that morning meet was the ideal farmer Ramineni Nageswara Rao. His ancestors came here from Guntur district and settled in that village. After their arrival, the village farmers began to raise commercial crops. The introduction of cotton, turmeric, tobacco and sugarcane changed the economic status of the people of that village.

Though Nageswar Rao is rich by any standard he looks simple. For him there is no menial thing in agriculture. He works along with his servants, unlike the local people who consider

attending cultivation work along with the labourers as below their dignity. His wife, mother, and his sister also work in the fields if necessary.

Later he started a poultry farm with the help of the financial loans provided by the government. Eggs and chicken from his poultry farm and milk and milk products from his dairy farm yielded him many dividends. He became a model farmer in that village and others started following his methods of cultivation.

Then he began his career in politics too. His friendship with Rajaiah brought him close to Mutyam Rao. He also became another village ward member in the previous panchayat elections. Later he also started dreaming about becoming the Sarpanch of that village.

Many people in that village believe that Nageswara Rao has links with the revolutionaries. There may be some truth in the rumours as he supports them economically and helps them in procuring the things they needed. He has a considerable influence in the political and police circles. Many of his relatives are police officials and some are even ministers also.

Another person in that group is Venkataswamy. Previously he worked as the high school head master in the village of Thimmapuram which is thirty kilometers away from Anantharam. Mutyam Rao has got him transferred to this village which is also his native place.

Yadagiri is another teacher who is at present working at Kotthapally, a village which is about ten kilometers from Anantharam. Venkataswamy brought him there on that day to request Mutyam Rao to get him transferred to this village.

Venkataswamy has some agricultural land in that village. He successfully lives in both roles — a head master and a cultivator. As an important person in the coterie of Mutyam Rao he takes up the issue of transfers of his colleagues to Mutyam Rao. He also does money lending business. He manages it so skilfully and secretly that only a few people know about it.

Another person who came there in that morning is Shankaraiah. Recently he joined Mutyam Rao's party. Before that he was in another political party and was the main opponent of Mutyam Rao. Soon he realized that it was impossible to come up politically as long as he worked against Mutyam Rao. And all his business ventures were failures which included a poultry farm and a rice mill. His political party, Samatha party also became fragmented, so considering everything he joined the group of Mutyam Rao. Now he is a contractor who takes up government works by tenders with the help of Mutyam Rao. He is also a ward member at present who is also the future aspirant for the post of Sarpanch.

Komaraiah, Somaiah, and Maisaiah are the leaders of the dalit groups.

Somaiah is the *Karobaar* of the village. Komaraiah and Maisaiah are the elected ward members from the wards reserved for the dalits. The three are very loyal to Mutyam Rao and made money out of the government schemes like eradication of poverty programmes and so on

"Sir, tell us about the town." Reminded Rajaiah Goud.

"Oh, so much to tell... Our village is going to get a junior college next year. The minister told me about it, yesterday," said Mutyam Rao.

"Very good. These days kids are going to the town and getting involved in all sorts of vices. No studies. Movies, drinking... all those things but no studies," said Maisaiah.

"Here also the same! What about television? Morning to evening... sitting before T.V.... watching movies, movies, and movies. We have plenty of beer or brandy available at our door steps, haven't we? To spoil oneself one need not go to the town. Today our villages have everything on par with the towns and cities," said Shankaraiah.

“That is true. Let there may be junior colleges or degree colleges, what is that these boys are learning? In future, getting a government job is almost impossible. Neither they can do the jobs that involve physical energy nor they can get decent jobs with their qualifications,” said Nageswara Rao.

“What about the protected water supply scheme to our village?” asked Shankaraiah.

“It was sanctioned but withheld because of the paucity of funds. In the next budget, I will see that it is included,” replied Mutyam Rao.

“You have developed this village to a great extent. Electricity, roads, bus facility, and what not? Sheep for the shepherds, bullocks for the poor farmers, houses to the dalits and loans for the needy. You have helped people in getting them. You deserve to be an M.L.A from this constituency,” said Rajaiah Goud.

“I am not that fortunate. I haven’t dreamt about it either. I am doing whatever good that I can do to this village,” said Mutyam Rao.

“This time, I am sure you will get nominated and you will become an MLA,” said Nageswara Rao.

“That is possible only with your cooperation. And you have that influence in our party from gross level cadre to the top,” said Rajaiah Goud.

“About the repairs to the big tank of our village, I request you to see that the contract for these repairs is allotted to me some how,” said Shankaraiah.

“What is that you gain in the end? After paying all the percentages from bottom to top above it is daily labour or zero added to zeroes,” said Rajaiah Goud.

“It is the present day routine. You also do the same, don’t you?” said Shankaraiah.

Then came a messenger village servant (Sakesindh) Bayyanna and he bowed to Mutyam Rao.

“What Bayyanna, what is the matter?” enquired Mutyam Rao.

“Mutthiah handed me this paper to give it to you, sir!?” said Bayyanna. One can see fear in his eyes and shaking hands. He handed over a paper to Mutyam Rao. The moment he opened that letter his face turned pale at once.

Something is written in red letters on that white paper.

“Mutyam Rao!

You are under our observation. We know that you are meeting police whenever you are in the town. You have become an informer to the police. And we know everything about your play-boy life and the lives of other people you have spoiled so far. Now it is the time you paid the price. People know how to punish you. Unless you change your ways it is certain you will meet the similar fate like that of Murahari Rao. Your gunmen cannot save you. Rest assured. Nobody can protect the betrayers of the people.

Veeraswamy

Commander of Ravulapally squad.

“What happened Sarpanch *saab*! What is written in that paper?” everybody asked anxiously.

“We can not stay in the village any more. Bad days have come in,” said Mutyam Rao, mopping the sweat from his face.

Now everybody could guess where that letter had come from. There is a sudden change in every body’s countenance.

“What is that they have written?” asked Venkataswamy the headmaster.

“You better read it,” Mutyam Rao passed the letter to him.

One by one read that letter.

“For some time its better you avoid coming to this village,” said Venkataswamy.

“How about it if we go and meet them once?” suggested Nageswara Rao.

“Don’t raise that issue now. It is beyond that situation. You better stay in the town for a while,” said Rajaiah Goud.

“Where can I go leaving my native place?” questioned Mutyam Rao.

“How can we manage without you? We lay our lives to protect you. You must not stop coming to the village. You have to look after the village,” said Maisaiah.

“This village is still good because of you. If you don’t come to this village then it will go to dogs,” said Komaraiah.

“Now what is more important is his life. Sir, you better stay in the town,” said Venkataswamy.

“What happens to my family and agriculture here? I don’t understand why these people have so much grudge against me?” said Mutyam Rao.

“What is there to understand sir? They do not want this village under your control.

They tolerate power when only it is with them,” said Rajaiah Goud.

“You did so much for this village. When you have done nothing wrong, there is no need to worry about it. We are there to protect you with our lives,” said Maisaiah.

“That is true. But it is better if he stays in the town for some time. At least five to six months,” said Venkataswamy.

Slowly one after the other took leave of Mutyam Rao. Venkataswamy along with Yadagiri followed suit.

While everybody was leaving the two gunmen were highly alert and were observing them intently. Mutyam Rao looked safe and invincible under their protection.

Venkataswamy and Yadagiri were going towards the local high school.

“There are varied opinions about our Sarpanch. Which one is truth and which one is false I can not make it out. Will you please clarify?” said Yadagiri on the way

“You tell me if you know. Then I will do my part,” said Venkataswamy.

“He is not as fair as he appears to be. He has illicit relationships with other women. First wife is in this village, the other one is in the town and another one is like a woman in a fort. Is it true?” asked Yadagiri.

“Only this much, or something else you know?”

“Much more! Without any profit he does nothing to anybody... Though he is instrumental in getting some facilities to the village, he took his prime cut in all those works like say ... in construction of high school rooms, electricity, cooperative bank loans, in sanctioning sheep for the shepherds, bullocks for the farmers, and etcetera. He gets his share by percentages in each and every government work that is allotted to this village,” said Yadagiri.

“Oh, tell me more of it,” said Venkataswamy.

“It is also heard that you also paid some money for your transfer to this village though I don’t believe all these rumours,” said Yadagiri.

“Nowadays people are very smart,” said Venkataswamy.

“How?” questioned Yadagiri.

“Our Sarpanch does everything very smoothly. Still these things are leaked out”

“Do you mean to say that there is some truth in these rumours?”

“How can you expect smoke without some fire? Mutyam Rao’s father was a Serdar (Supervisor) of this village landlord. That landlord was killed by the Sangham people of the communist movement. People say that Mutyam Rao is the product of the illicit relationship between the landlord and Mutyam Rao’s mother.

After the death of the landlord, Mutyam Rao’s father acquired most of the landlord’s property. By the time Mutyam Rao completed his disinterested studies up to tenth class his father died.

Under his mother’s care and money’s pride he grew up to be a womanizer and a spendthrift. He couldn’t mend his ways even after his marriage. Money and power won him many women into his fold and to win them he did not hesitate to remove the obstacles.

He even killed his servant Bhikshapathi to continue his illicit relationship with the latter’s wife and made it appear as suicide. Later he joined politics and got good name. He became Sarpanch for three times. Though he did some good work to the village he gained from everything. In the town also he hooked a married woman, and both of them killed that woman’s husband and made it appear as suicide. The police also closed that case concluding it as suicide. Now he stays with her in the town and has two sons by her.

This habit made him a maniac. Nobody knows how many women have fallen into his traps and how many murders he has committed. So far he has been successful in getting out of the problems by spending money or with political clout. Now I don’t think these revolutionaries will let him go scot free,” said Venkataswamy.

“It seems there is some recent addition?” said Yadagiri.

“Yes, Sujata. She is a teacher. Her husband was in the police department who died in the landmine blast. She got her job as a teacher on compassionate grounds. She has a son and a daughter. She had very good name as a teacher and when she approached Mutyam Rao for her transfer to the town he obliged her but for a price. When this relationship was questioned by her rebel son who was studying intermediate then, he got him arrested by the police branding him as a Naxalite. They beat him to pulp and left him on the road. He recovered from death bed and gave up his studies to join the armed squad of Veeraswamy,” said Venkataswamy.

“That means his days are being counted...?” said Yadagiri.

“We can’t say!. He has two gunmen always with him. After the episode of Sujata’s son he started spending most of his time in the town. He comes to the village very often,” said Venkataswamy.

“What about Sujata?” asked Yadagiri.

“It seems Sujata left for Bombay to stay with her brother in order to avoid nuisance with the police. The most surprising thing is that despite all these incidents his influence has been intact.

He always gets his things done in his own way. That’s why many people gather all around him always,” said Venkataswamy.

“We also went to him though we know about him well,” said Yadagiri.

“Yes, we want our things done. In our system no work is done on its merits. Somebody has to be there to help the things move. You know the three ‘W’s... wealth, woman and wine... without one of these, no work is done in this system,” said Venkataswamy.

They reached the school premises by then.

“You are lucky. You have your job in your own village. I wish I too get my job in my village. But when?” said Yadagiri.

“Don’t worry. You too get your wish fulfilled with the help of Mutyam Rao.”

“This is the time for my bus,” said Yadagiri.

“Good. We shall meet tomorrow,” said Venkataswamy entering the school campus.

Yadagiri walked up to the bus stop and there he waited for the bus to come.

* * * *

Five or six months passed.

Mutyam Rao almost stopped coming to Anantharam.

On some occasional visits he was with full protection and his staying in the village was very much brief.

Meanwhile there was also some decrease in the activities of the revolutionaries. Many of the revolutionaries were killed in the encounters. The police claimed that they had broken the backbone of the movement.

Mutyam Rao also felt assured of his safety. He visited Anantharam with minimum security and spent two or three nights in the village. Intelligence reports assured him that the armed squad of Veeraswamy was inactive in that area for they had beefed up the surveillance.

* * * *

Another couple of months passed.

One day Rajaiah Goud came to the house of Mutyam Rao in the town. He invited him to attend his brother’s marriage to be held at Anantharam. Since all the important leaders are to attend

the marriage, he is making arrangements in a grand style which includes a grand party during that night, so his presence is a must, he implored.

Mutyam Rao decided to go. And there is also a personal reason. That is Sarala. The recent addition to his harem. She is a beautiful young lady who has given him the pleasures of a paradise. The mere thought of seeing her, filled him with the urge to visit Anantharam. Sarala is the daughter of his father-in-law's younger brother. That girl has an eye on her rich and powerful brother in law, but she had to marry a poor and ugly daily labourer. That she could not come to terms with her present life is no secret. She always believes that the right place for her to live in is only the palace. So when both of them met in the recent times Mutyam Rao promised her the heavenly sky and she in turn responded to him with her natural charm. What more a man can expect than a willing woman's sweet embrace!

Now the voluptuous Sarala occupied his thoughts. At the pretext of attending the marriage he also wanted to spend some night with her. So he accepted his invitation.

Early morning on a Friday, along with two gunmen, he reached Anantharam by 9.30 a.m.

About two thousand people attended the marriage. Many people greeted him. After blessing the newly wedded couple, Mutyam Rao along with the other leaders and his two gunmen started towards the dining hall just beside the marriage pandal (hall). As they were about to enter the dining hall, suddenly there was a huge explosion that shook the whole place. A deafening sound exploded the ears. Fierce flames touched the sky. Mutyam Rao along with other leaders and his gunmen were burnt to death. Splintered bodies, severed limbs, and decapitated heads were scattered all around. What a ghastly scene that was? People ran in all directions knowing that it was a hand grenade attack by extremists. The beautiful pandal turned into a graveyard within a few minutes. Mutyam Rao and nine others died on the spot.

The media had a field day. They published the news with big headlines.

“Blood sprent” cried one magazine. “Extremists killed ten people while targetting one.”

“Blood bath in Trilinga Island.”

“A blood pond in Trilinga Island;” “Blood Spillage in that Village.”

“This is not revolution, but repulsion.” Such statements and stories dominated the day’s news.

The so called important people in the society gave their trademark statements:

“There is no place for violence in democracy.”

“A cowardly act! These anti social elements must be crushed away mercilessly.”

“Violence begets violence”

“It is obvious that this government failed miserably in protecting the innocent lives.”

“It is unjust and cruel to kill so many innocent people in the hunt for one.”

“Mother Earth is on the verge of delivering a new society. At this stage some mistakes are bound to happen. In this process some innocent people may die. While eliminating a demon like Mutyam Rao it is necessary to remove others surrounding him. Like the fire in the hot iron which also receives the strike from the mallet.”

Thus the statements for and against the incident dominated the news.

The next day was a black lettered day in the history of the Anantharam village. The police raided the village in great numbers

and apprehended the suspected youth, interrogated them, and subjected them to physical torture. They demolished the houses of the extremist sympathizers and beat them to pulp forcing them to reveal the identity of the assailants.

“You people talk about violence, why don’t you condemn the state violence?” questioned the people’s rights group.

7

Seethampet is a village thirty kilometers away from Ravulapally.

It is a medium sized village of about six hundred houses with people of almost all classes and castes living together. Outside the main village is the Madigagudem (colony of Dalits) with about fifty houses.

Most of them in that village belong to backward classes like potters, carpenters, weavers, shepherds, toddy tapers, washer men and black smiths. Forward castes like velamas, Reddys, Brahmins and Vysyas are less in number.

It is a peaceful village with people belonging to various sections and castes who live in harmony without caste differences. They greet one another as close relatives but these nasty politics have ruined the age old and cosy and lasting environment of mutual affection. This is the strong and firm opinion of some old people of that village.

The people of the ruling class of that village believe that the reason for the peace and tranquility that prevailed in their villages is due to the excellent and efficient rule of Karunakar Rao. Because of him they say that police have not entered the village so far.

Actually, Karunakar Rao belongs to the Reddy community. All the Deshmukhs during those days had the suffix ‘Rao’ to their names.

Karunakar Rao belongs to the family of landlords. Once they owned thousands of acres of land surrounding their village. After the Zamindari Act and Land Ceiling Act had come into force, they sold out most of their lands and transferred some of them to their nearest relatives.

Karunakar Rao's father was Dayakara Rao who died long ago... Karunakar Rao was twenty five years old at that time. Since then he has been the undisputed ruler of that village.

He has four younger brothers and three sisters. All are married and settled well in the cities nearby. But Karunakar Rao has stayed back in the village looking after his lands and agriculture.

Next to Karunakar Rao is Sukhender Reddy. After completing his B.A. he joined politics.

He excelled both in politics and business. He owns a few rice mills, iron and hardware shops in Vangala town.

Narender Reddy is the next one. After completion of his B.Sc he joined government service as Tahasildar and later he was promoted as Revenue Divisional Officer. He may become District Collector one day.

The third brother Ramakrishna Reddy is an M.B.B.S doctor who has got very good name as a practicing physician. The last one Venkateswara Reddy discontinued his intermediate education and followed his brother Sukhender Reddy's footsteps in politics.

Karunakar Rao looks very handsome with six feet height, robust physique, and fair complexion. Dressed in pure white silks he and all his brothers spread grandeur and royalty in their vicinities. Karunakar Rao has three sons and two daughters who stay in Vangala town and are at various levels of education.

Karunakar Rao's lands and agriculture are supervised by Venkatadri, the Serdar (supervisor). His grandfather and father

also worked as Serdars under Karunakar Rao's forefathers. So his loyalty to his master is unquestioned and recognized by everyone in the village. They are ever ready to lay down their lives in protecting their master's interests.

Karunakar Rao's agricultural farm is a very big one. With twenty five farm maids and servants, ten pairs of bullocks, a large herd of cows and bulls, bisons and buffaloes and many grass lands to cater to the needs of the cattle. Three big wells fitted with electric motors supply water to the fields. Thatched huts are provided for the farm servants near the paddy fields for they have to stay and look after the crops. Nearby there are many banyan trees, tamarind trees and mango trees. On the east side of the village his lands are extended from this village to the next one. Some are paddy fields, some are gardens, and some are dry lands. Rice, millets, sorghum, corn and peanuts are the main crops.

Venkatadri is the most loyal servant and the sole supervisor of Karunakar Rao's lands. He never allows anybody trespassing his master's lands. He neither tolerates anybody else's cattle grazing in the lands of Deshmukh nor allows anybody to pick up a single fruit from the trees.

People believe that Karunakar Rao is a very kind hearted gentleman. He is sincere in paying his servants by the clock, mostly in the form of kind that is paddy and they exchange it in the grocery shop for the daily commodities like pulses, oil, salt and etcetera.

Cash is rarely seen in that village. During festivals and on other festive occasions all the farm servants are given a treat in the house of Karunakar Rao. They believe that Karunakar Rao will take care of them in thick and thin.

But in their view Venkatadri is a very bad and cruel. Venkaatadri never tolerated carelessness at the work. The filthy words that flow out from his mouth like a stream made him very unpopular among all the servants. He protects his master's property with all his might. He firmly believes that it is his moral

responsibility to take care of every single piece of Deshmukh's lands.

In these villages there is a lot of use of the cow dung. People use it as *kalapi*, to sprinkle it after mixing with water on the ground when it is swept clean, and the dry cow dung cakes are used as fuel in place of fire wood. It is also a very good manure for the crops. It is considered a crime to steal the cow dung from the fields.

Latchaiah is one of the farm servants who works for Karunakar Rao. He belongs to Madiga community. He has a wife, Mutthamma and two sons. The elder one Yadaiah completed intermediate education and the other one is in the tenth class now. With the help of his brother-in-law, who is intown, Latchaiah has got his sons admitted into the hostel meant for the students of scheduled caste to pursue their studies. Presently his elder son Yadaiah is in search of a job so he more often stays in the village.

On that fateful day Mutthamma decided to collect some dried cow dung for fuel from the fields of Karunakar Rao. She presumed that in the hot summer evening, nobody will be in a position to watch her collecting the meagre cow dung.

She filled up her first basket and dumped them in front of her house, instructed her daughter to place them inside and returned. It was already setting dark. She made three more trips and the fifth time when she was busy filling the basket she heard a harsh voice suddenly.

“Who is that whore? How dare you to collect cowdung without my permission? I will cut her into pieces.” These cold words pierced her heart. Knowing that the person is none other than Venkatadri her heart sank with fear and apprehension. She tried to run away from the place. But she couldn't do so as her feet got stuck up in the muddy field.

Venkatadri with his dark and robust body appeared like a small hillock as he was moving towards her.

“Who are you? How dare you to steal from the Deshmukh’s lands? Do you want to escape from the eyes of Venkatadri? This moment if I won’t bury you in this field itself who am I?...”

Thus cursing and crying Venkatadri approached her. Mutthamma was shivering with shame. She knew how ugly it would be if this incident was known to public. For a moment she prayed for death to take her in.

“You Mutthi? You are our farm servant, Latchaiah’s wife, aren’t you? What happened to you? I never imagined that you would commit this sort of act,” sneered Venkatadri.

“Not much sir! Not even half a basket. Just to lit the fire place. Forgive me. I won’t do it again. I am your slave, please.” she pleaded.

“How? If I leave you today, then others will follow you tomorrow. Have you ever seen anybody who dared to touch anything in Deshmukh’s lands? You are the first and the last one to do so. Now if I kill you here itself, let us see who will come to your rescue?” shouted Venkatadri almost coming to her at a hand’s distance.

Mutthamma understood that this man is in complete drunken state. Anger over powered him. She begged him for mercy. But he is no mood to heed.

“I confess. It’s my mistake sir! Won’t do it again. Kill me sir, if I ever do it again. I am your servant...your slave, sir,” she pleaded him again and again falling upon his feet.

At once he pulled his feet back as if a snake or a scorpion touched him. Because she is an untouchable woman. He could not tolerate this insolence of an untouchable woman touching his feet.

“Touch me not! You low caste filthy woman! You whore,! You obstinate woman!” his language was very much abusive,

“Sir, don’t scold me like that. I have collected only a few cakes of cow dung and you can count them here itself. I have dropped them again in your field only. Sir, forgive me and let me go.”

“Only few? To whom are you telling these stories? How many such baskets of cow dung were dumped in your house? Don’t I know? Come on! Let’s go to your house and check them,” said Venkatadri.

The dried cakes of cow dung cake is called *Pidakas* which are used as fuel in traditional ovens.

“I don’t have them in my house. Whatever I have gathered I have already dumped them in your field only sir” she cried

“If I find some of the cakes cow dung in your house what will you pay me as a penalty? Will you be ready to sleep with anybody whom I suggest if your crime is proved? Let donkeys...”

“Sir! Say no more! For this small crime how can you abuse me like this? Please...”

“You untouchable inferior creature of low birth! You have committed an unpardonable crime yet you rebuke me? why have you stepped into these fields without anybody’s permission?”

“What did I do? I returned your property. Why do make so much fuss over a trivial thing?”

“What do you say? Am I making fuss? You commit a crime and get caught red handed and when questioned, you say that I am making fuss? What arrogance? Head strong lady!” He searched for a stone to break her bones.

She started walking towards her home.

“Stop! I say stop there!” he cried at top of his voice.

She stopped.

“If I show Pidakas in your house how much penalty you are going to pay?” he stressed.

“Whatever you ask for,” she said. She is sure that her daughter by this time must have hidden them in some place.

They started walking towards Madigagudem

His cursing and chiding was nonstop.

The thatched huts in Madigagudem were enveloped by darkness. The kerosene lamps that were lit here and there were not sufficient to dispel the darkness hovering there.

Everybody suspected something amiss when they saw Muthamma walking briskly, while Venkatadri following her cursing and childing. So everyone in Madigagudem followed them to the house of Mutthamma.

Unfortunately the heap of cow dung cakes was still there. Muthamma’s daughter didn’t hide them inside the hut.

Venkatadri turned violent.

“Now see everybody. Open your eyes and see. See! How many baskets full of Pidakas are there? She committed the theft and tried to hide it. Mutthamma! What do you say now? Hey! You wanted to side track me, eh!?”

The onlookers understood what happened. Now they knew that nobody could save Mutthamma.

They know that. The crime is established. The punishment is due any time now.

Somebody informed Latchaiah about the incident and he came there running. He was almost gasping. On seeing him, Venkatadri shouted at top of his voice.

“Re, Latchiga... See what has your wife done? She committed theft in the fields of our Deshmukh. Tell me what sort of punishment she deserves? Lay her among...”

“Sir, we are your servants. Excuse us this time. She is innocent. I am your slave, sir.”

“You want me to forget this matter here itself! How? You tell me how? You are her husband. You punish her with hundred slaps. Otherwise I shall report this matter to the police. Then they will take care of the rest,” thundered Venkatadri.

“Hundred slaps...! Can she live after receiving hundred slaps, sir?” cried Latchaiah.

“Yes. Hundred slaps! In front of... all these people... Like you beat the disobedient buffalo in the field. Just like that. Hundred slaps. Not a single slap more or even less,” ordered Venkatadri.

“She is a weak woman. She cannot withstand hundred slaps. Make it fifty sir,” said Maisaiah. He is the leader of that Dality colony.

“Alright, let us agree to it. Re, Latchiga! Did you hear what your leader said? Slap her. On this cheek ten. The other side ten. Thirty on the back... Let us be reasonable. Use only your hand but not sticks. Yes. Start! For each Pidaka one slap. It must be a lesson to all others. Come on. Slap her,” instructed Venkatadri.

Latchaiah became furious. He was angry with himself. He was also angry with his parents for they brought him to this ugly world. Then he was angry with that rogue Venkatadri and also with those people who were enjoying fun. He was angry even with Maisaiah.

He wished to see the Deshmukh immediately to seek justice. He was sure that their master would be reasonable for he always appeared kindly to them. Everybody says he is gentle and god like. He will definitely do justice. Then how to approach him? This demon Venkatadri, does he let him see the Deshmukh?

“You idiot! Why are you standing like a stony idol? Are you going to slap her or you want me to order Narasimhulu to do the job?” roared Venkatadri.

Narasimhulu is the chief servant who is ever ready to follow the orders of the Deshmukh or his Serdar Venkatadri. With a big hand stick in his hand, he is waiting for the signal to do so.

He is very rude but faithful to Venkatadri. One slap from him means it is the end of life for Mutthamma. To save her it is better if I only slap her,” with this thought Lachaiah himself slapped his wife.

“One...” counted Venkatadri.

Latchaiah repeated.

“Two...”said Venkatadri.

There was silence. People who gathered there were silent.

Latchaiah was hitting her. Venkatadri was counting. ...eleven,..twelve ...

Yadaiah came running there. He saw the situation. He held his father by hand and stopped him. “Why father? Why are you beating my mother?” questioned Yadaiah.

“Your mother brought dried cow dung without permission from Deshmukh’s land. That’s why she is being punished,” explained Narasimhulu.

“For that small issue... such a cruel punishment? Stop it! She will die otherwise,” said Yadaiah.

“Re Yadiga! You stay back! Till I finish counting fifty your father is supposed to slap her. If you interfere you’ll also face the music,” warned Venkatadri.

“So you are the one who is behind this atrocity?” Yadaiah stared at Venkatadri.

“For the theft she has committed your leader himself proclaimed the judgment. Better if you don’t interfere,” cautioned Venkatadri.

“There will be problem for you if there is one more slap” warned Yadaiah.

“What can you do? Come on!” Narasimhulu held Yadaiah tight by hands. Yadaiah tried his best to reach his mother. Narasimhulu gave a heavy blow on his head with his stick. Blood flowed from Yadaiah’s scalp. Somebody held him while he was falling on the ground.

“Oh my son!” Mutthamma tried to reach her bleeding son. Narasimhulu stopped her. Maisaiah and others restricted Yadaiah.

“Continue! Only fifteen slaps are over. What about the rest? Carry on...”shouted Venkatadri.

Latchaiah continued the punishment. His hands were shaking.

“Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen...” Venkatadri went on counting with sadistic pleasure.

Yadaiah’s blood boiled. He struggled to get out of their hold to protect his mother.

“No. Don’t try Yadaiah! If you make one more move, Narasimha will smite you. Nothing will happen to your mother. How many times did your father not beat her when he was drunk? Imagine that it is also the same,” said Maisaiah.

Yadaiah wondered which side is this man of his own caste!

Fifty slaps were completed.

Mutthamma started weeping while covering her face with her hands.

Latchaiah, Yadaiah and Yadaiah's younger brother were aghast. Anger and indignation made them weep uncontrollably.

"Re Narasimhulu! You bring that heap of Pidakas to my home. You people, mind it! If anybody repeats the same, the punishment will be more severe," he warned all of them and left. Narasimhulu obliged the Serdar's orders.

After everybody had left they went into their house. They applied Saffron to Yadaiah's wound.

"Why did you go into the fields of Deshmukh? Don't you get Pidakas some where else? You know well about the character of the Serdar," said Latchaiah.

"Even then what kind of punishment is this? I'll complain this to the Deshmukh..."

Do you mean to say that Deshmukh is very kind and generous? Let us see how good he is," said Yadaiah getting ready to leave.

"At this time of night, no! no. We can't go," said Latchaiah.

"What happens? I am going now. You follow me. I tell him about the whole incident. I ask him whether it is the right punishment. If he is really wise and kind he will punish Venkatadri in the same manner he has treated my mother..." Yadaiah was furious.

"I don't mind if he is not slapped. Deshmukh sir should reprimand him. He has to warn him not to repeat such mistakes," said Latchaiah with feeble voice

"I will tell him if justice is not done here, then we will seek it elsewhere," said Yadaiah.

"No. No. If we tell him like that then he'll consider it as a warning to him and his people won't allow us to live in the village," said Latchaiah.

“It won’t make much difference! What is that we gain by living here?” Yadaiah was serious.

“That is not correct. Deshmukh is a gentleman. Venkatadri is playing many undesirable tricks at his back. If we disclose them, he will remove him from the post of Serdar,” said Latchaiah confidently. Yadaiah is not sure of it. Pity! His father still believes them.

He could not sleep that night. His mind was obsessed with Umpteen thoughts. What kind of justice is prevailed in this land? Is this a human society or a jungle? For a small mistake what amount of punishment it is? Is it because they are born as Madigas, the lowest caste people? We are slaves, aren’t we? Even worse than that! Being born as madigas the life is worse than that of pigs and dogs. What is that our political teacher has taught? He has taught us that everybody is equal. Everyone who is born on this earth has a right to live with freedom and liberty.

Where are those rights? If they exist how can this fellow Venkatadri can commit such atrocity on us? How can he stay with such impunity after committing such a heinous crime? His mind is in great turmoil.

It is morning already.

They started and reached the Deshmukh’s residence after some time.

On the way they met Maisaiah, who was already returning from the village.

“If there is any thing to say I’ll have already conveyed it... why are you going on your own? Who will listen to your words there? You may not have his audience today,” said Maisaiah.

They did not bother to take his advice and they proceeded further.

Deshmukh’s residence is a big estate. It looked like a big fort. People call it as ‘Gadi.’

There are lots of people working. Some are sweeping the floor, some sprinkling water, some cleaning vessels, and some bringing water. Everybody is busy. His residence compound which occupied almost half of the village is spread over almost five to six acres protected on all sides by strong and high walls. During the armed struggle in the forties the revolutionaries tried their best to demolish it but they could only make a few dents here and there. Later Deshmukh got them repaired.

In front of the residence there is 'diwankhana' where Deshmukh makes his daily appearance at about eight o'clock and attends the grievances of his subjects.

After the independence, small kingdoms and kings disappeared from the village scene and after the abolition of privy purses and zamindari system only a little pompous and pageantry is left. Diwankhana is a vestige of that past grandeur.

After waiting for a long time they were allowed to see the Deshmukh.

Deshmukh was relaxing in his easy chair. He was dressed in pure white attire with the pomp of a god in the temple. They saluted him again and again with utmost respect.

"What happened Latchiga! You have come here so early this morning accompanied by your wife and son. What is the matter?" asked Karunakar Rao, the Deshmukh.

Venkatadri also appeared there at the same time.

"Sir, we want to bring this issue to your notice!?" said Yadaiah. He was rehearsing that sentence for a long time.

"Yes, tell me. This is the people's government. You are the people and you are the kings. What is your son's name, Latchaiah? I forgot," asked Deshmukh.

"His name is Yadigadu, sir banchen!" ('banchen' is a word which means I am your slave)

“No. No. Call him Yadaiah. Those days are gone.”

“Your kindness sir...”

“What are you studying Yadaiah?” enquired Deshmukh.

“Completed intermediate sir,” replied Yadaiah.

“What about your brother?”

“This year he has completed tenth class, sir!”

“Are you going to study further?”

“I want to. But my father thinks otherwise. He expects me to do some job and support him.”

“Latchaiah! Let him study further. You all must get educated and know what is happening in this world. Then only this country will shine bright.”

At that moment Deshmukh appeared to be a righteous man to Yadaiah.

They hesitated for a moment. All other household servants were looking at them curiously. Yadaiah began narrating the yesterday’s incident.

“Yesterday my mother... without knowing that it is your land... she collected some dried cow dung for fuel. For that small mistake, even after explaining everything your Serdar Venkatadri not only abused my mother foulest language and made my father slap her fifty times in front of the whole village. Is it right for that small mistake to award such cruel punishment? we wish to bring it to your notice, sir! Everybody says you are kind and righteous. But your Serdar is resorting to many such atrocities with your name. Yesterday he insulted my mother before everybody. You yourself said this is the people’s government and people are the kings. You decide whether your Serdar has done right or wrong? Do justice to us. That’s why we have come to you, sir,” said Yadaiah.

Deshmukh appeared to have paid much attention to each and every word of what Yadaiah had spoken. But his discomfort was very much noticeable. He threw a sharp glance at Venkatadri and remained silent for a while. Seriousness permeated the whole area.

Everybody remained on their toes waiting for the reply from the Deshmukh.

“Anything you wish to say Latchaiah?” questioned Deshmukh looking at him.

“What more can I say, sir. We are your slaves. I was at your service since my childhood. Day and night all these years... So far, me or my wife was never ill treated by anybody. Yesterday she committed a small mistake. She collected that dried cow dung from your fields. Yes! That is a mistake. We don't dispute with that. But for that small issue is it right to punish her so brutally that way, sir? If your Serdar does this way, then to whom we have to complain, sir? You are our protector and god...,” said Latchaiah.

Again, Deshmukh went into deep thoughts. After coming out of trance, he poked a look at Venkatadri, which probably meant what headache he had created for him. Then he glanced at all around. Now with a voice of dignity and authority he began his speech.

“In our land and fields cattle roam without hindrance and they excrete. That becomes dung. Say whose cattle did that? You all know they belong to Deshmukh. That dried cow dung belongs to whom? Of course... you know. What happens to the cow dung later? It gets mixed with the soil and becomes manure. Because of that manure fields yield more crops. More rice... More rice means more food for the people. As you are collecting and using that cow dung for fuel purposes, so my lands are deprived of that valuable manure. And those fields now yield 'less produce' which means less rice. If there is no rice where can you get food from? If there is no food then how can you work? May be it is a

small mistake in your view, but that is causing great damage to my fields and rice production. Less rice production means less food to the people. I said this is people's government. True. You are people. Whatever you say I accept it. Do you think depriving the poor of their food is right?" said Deshmukh.

"That is a serious mistake especially depriving the poor of their food" agreed all of them who assembled there.

"By collecting four baskets of Pidakas (Dried up cow dung) from my lands see how much loss we incurred. My loss doesn't matter. What about the loss to the country? Calculate how many people may forgo their food because of her thoughtless act. You decide that! Is it a small or big mistake?" asked Deshmukh.

People who gathered there looked at one another. Yadaiah could not believe his ears. The argument of Deshmukh linking the removal of a few baskets of dried cow dung with the country's food problem stunned him.

"It is a big mistake," agreed everybody.

"So it is a big mistake. And what was the punishment executed by Venkatadri? He made her husband punish her. He did not order others to slap her. Is it the first time a husband beating his wife? Or, say did Latchaiah not beat her any time previously? You have seen him beating her many times in his drunken state. Consider this also as one of those incidents... And who is Latchaiah? He is our farm employee. Tomorrow he has to till the land and see that it yields good crops. Even after working day and night also if the land fails to yield anything how much pain he will experience? Why has it happened? Because somebody robbed the fields of their energy. Is this not one kind of robbery? Who robbed the manure this time? Latchaiah's wife. To avoid going to police station he himself punished her. What is the role of Venkatadri in it?" said Deshmukh.

By that time Maisaiah, the spokesman of the gudem also arrived there.

“What Mutthi? Who slapped you? None other than your husband... How many times did he not beat you when he was drunk? We all witnessed those incidents. What else is new? Have you come here to complain for that? Go! Go home. Somebody else would have complained to the police. Since he is kind enough, he let it go there itself,” said Maisaiah.

“If I were there I could have killed you. In future, if you commit the same crime, I will sacrifice you for the same land,” roared the head servant Narsimhulu.

“No injustice is done to you. Beating the wife is a common thing. See that the mistake is not repeated again,” saying this he turned towards Venkatadri.

“Re, Venkatadri! Control your tongue. Those days are gone. Nobody tolerates obscene or foul language anymore. Yadaiah and his brother are now getting educated in the town. Behave with them in a proper way,” said Deshmukh leaving the meeting hall with a nod so that others too can leave.

Everybody left the place except Latchaiah, Mutthamma, and Yadaiah. They were in a state of shock. They began to hear the words of Deshmukh again and again.

“Go! Why are you sitting here still? Go!” said Narsimhulu in a harsh tone.

They left the place and started heading towards their Gudem.

Yadaiah was thinking.

All these days he has been of the opinion that Deshmukh is a righteous man. After seeing and hearing him he could now make out what type of a person this Deshmukh is. A wolf in sheep's skin! A honey smeared knife. A deceptive appearance... How he befools others!

He thought that Deshmukh will definitely rebuke Venkatadri for his high handedness.

He expected that Venkatadri would be punished the same way his mother has suffered. But Deshmukh took the side of his Serdar ignoring their pleas. Why? The more he thought the more he became angry. His blood boiled with boundless anger.

What kind of punishment is this just for collecting a few dried dung pieces? The whole gudem witnessed it as mere fun. His father is one of the farm servants in the Deshmukh's lands. Day and night he works for the welfare of Deshmukh. What is that he they have got in return? Utter humiliation! By collecting a few baskets of cow dung he says that has taken away food from many people. Are we not people? What about us? It is very common in the villages for the poor people to collect the cow dung from the fields to use it as the fuel. The rich get these Pidakas prepared from cow dung in their own houses and store them. The poor people have to gather this fuel day in and day out. It is the usual practice for the poor people collecting Pidakas in the vast lands of landlords. If anybody is caught in the act, the owner usually reprimands the culprit or make them return the stolen Pidakas. But punishing with fifty slaps in front of the whole village, what a savage act it is! How cruel! And the Deshmukh openly supports it. Now it is clear that Deshmukh is not a righteous man. In fact both of them-the Serdar and the Deshmukh play in the same game. It is propaganda of Deshmukh that he is right and the Serdar is cruel. This is how they are cheating the people. A plot to oppress the people... It is a daylight robbery... The rich robbing the poor...

These people have driven us out of their village frontiers. They treat us as the untouchables.

For generations together this is in vogue. Many great people, Mahatmas and social reformers have made their efforts. Many laws and acts are there. However, there is no end to these atrocities on us. Even our future seems to be very blank. Something like that of a surgical operation is needed... or... this society has to be uprooted and on its ruins a society of new order is to be built. Unless this is done there is no chance for the

downtrodden people to come up. This society which is based upon the feudal laws must be destroyed. Otherwise this foul smelling, putrid society will not change its ways. For that noble purpose of demolishing this cruel and heartless society some sacrifice or some fight is due. That is what one has to do. Yes!.. I must join the people who are genuinely fighting for the cause of the oppressed. Yes! That is what I have to do.

Yadaiah for a while thought of the consequences he and his family members have to face in case if he joins the revolutionaries. It will be a great blow to them. They may not know my whereabouts the police may torture his parents, brother and sister. How can he leave them to their fate and join the revolutionaries?

All the three reached their house in gudem.

One week passed...

One day in the evening... Yadaiah and his friends were involved in a leisurely talk on the bank of the village pond. This pond is on the east side of the village and beyond the pond there is a mangrove of toddy trees. Toddy is drawn from the trees by the toddy tappers, called 'Gouds,' and is supplied to the consumers. Many consumers prefer to enjoy the flavour and taste of the freshly drawn toddy, so they go to the toddy place itself. However, the toddy is delivered to the rich at their doorstep.

Venkatadri likes fresh toddy. So every day by four in the evening he reaches the place and consumes fresh toddy to his heart's content supplied by Ramaswamy Goud and his wife. Once that liquor is in, he floats in air experiencing a pleasure trip while his mouth spits innuendos on whoever in the perimeter of his visual zone at slightest provocation.

On that day also, he filled his stomach with full of toddy and began narrating to some of the people around him the recent incident in which he punished the erred untouchable woman who dared enough to collect the dried cow dung from the fields

of the Deshmukh. While they were coming back he found Yadaiah sitting with his friends. Pointing out his finger at Yadaiah spoke Venkatadri.

“This fellow... this one... is her son... getting... educated in city, you know! He is arrogant. He tried to complain against me to our Deshmukh. He wished to get me reprimanded by our Deshmukh, but what happened? This fellow lost his face. Deshmukh himself rebuked him. One has to show these low caste people their own place. Otherwise these bastards will try to rule us. This government has no sense. By providing so many facilities to them it wanted to make these people attain equality with us. These beef eating bastards...” before Venkatadri finished Yadaiah stood up and warned him.

“Re, Sathani fellow! Stop babbling!” (Venkatadri belongs to Sathani Caste).

“How dare you to call me with my caste name... you Madiga-low-birth fellow... me... the Serdar of Deshmukh... you abuse me? Let your mother be...” fucked by.....”

Unable to tolerate the abusive tirade, Yadaiah jumped over Venkatadri and gave a heavy blow in his stomach which made Venkatadri fall on the ground. Yadaiah jumped over his chest and began to squeeze his throat with his two hands. Venkatadri turned pale and his eyes became still. A few more minutes would have been enough to leave him dead. However, people who were watching the scene, pulled Yadaiah away rescued Venkatadri. Venkatadri was shaking with fear like a sheep in rain.

People from the surrounding area gathered there noticing the commotion. Some from the mangrove and some from the village... Narsimhulu also arrived there.

“How dare you to touch the Serdar of the Deshmukh? I will handover you to the police and see that your arrogance is rewarded with fitting reply. Otherwise my name is not Narsimhulu,” said he.

“Just to nip this fellow do we need police? Come on! Let us sacrifice this creature to Katta Maisamma, the goddess of the village tank,” supported Kodandam another faithful servant of the Deshmukh. Taking that cue all those who are loyal to the Deshmukh started beating Yadaiah mercilessly. Their hand sticks danced merrily on the body of that unfortunate youth. Yadaiah tried to save himself. But he fell on his back in a pool of blood.

Venkatadri observed the scene for a while and was certain that Yadaiah might not endure the onslaught further. He thought if that fellow died, he would be blamed. “Stop! Leave him alone!” he cried.

However, they were in no mood to hear him.

This time he made a roar, and that could stop the assailants.

Somebody informed the matter to Yadaiah’s parents who came there running. With them their children reached the place and found Yadaiah in his blood drenched clothes.

“Your son’s behaviour is not good. He manhandled the Serdar. We are going to hand over him to the police. If he continues to behave like this he may not live longer” warned Narasimhulu.

“Can’t he see the difference between him and others? A meagre knowledge of a few letters of alphabet in the town has made him so arrogant? Has he forgotten that he is born in the madiga caste? Bad thoughts in bad times,” added Kodandam.

“The seer Brahman already predicted this. He warned about the Mlechhas, the non Aryans entering the temples and ruling this country. Now we can see that by our own eyes,” said Venugopalachary, the village gold-smith.

“This is the age of Kali. Everywhere bad deeds and sins are becoming rampant. Such things are going to be common in near future,” said Sathagopachary, the village doctor.

All of them who gathered there came to conclusion that it was all because of Yadaiah's mistake.

Yadaiah's parents took him to their house.

Venkatadri with his henchmen sought the audience of the Deshmukh and explained the incident. Irritated by the idiotic behaviour of these people he became very angry.

"How many times should I tell you? With a few drops of toddy inside, you lose your brain and behave yourself like a drunken monkey. I told you not to insult them. These days if anything you say against this Madiga community then it leads to serious repercussions. What did I tell you? You should have let the matter closed there itself when that woman tried to collect a few pieces of cow dung. Instead you gave her a heavy punishment in front of all. What is that you have in your head? Why don't you understand these things? The days have changed. Today you have insulted again that young fellow who studies in the city. He is a young and hot blooded man. How can he tolerate your abusive language. He has the support of his community. If you ill-treat him, the consequences you have already noticed. You are Lucky. Survived by cat's whisker!... It is your kids' luck. But Narasimhulu and Kodandam beat him to pulp. What happens if the media comes to know about it? Newspapers cry hoarse that in Seethampet there is no protection for Dalits. They may write that Deshmukh himself is against the downtrodden.

Do you know how much bad image it creates about me? Whatever you do, people now think it is my handwork. I told you to be fair with the servants and farm workers. Nowadays you cannot beat them to extract work from them. A good word now and then, that's all... People must think that our Deshmukh is a righteousman and almost god-like. My policy is to be good with each and everybody and you have spoiled all that image of mine with this such small and isly incidents"

"Do you want me to take Yadaiah to the police station and handover him to the police?" asked Narsimhulu.

“After hearing all the story of Ramayana a person like you asked how Rama was related to Sita? Idiot! What you have done is enough. There is no need to approach the police. From here onwards you are not to have any altercation with those people,” warned Deshmukh Karunakar Rao.

Narasimhulu saw a god in his master’s voice and person.

* * * *

Three days passed.

On the fourth day’s morning a rumour spread all over the village that both the sons of Latchaiah of madiga caste left the village and went underground to join the revolutionaries. After a few days it was confirmed that they were in the armed squad of Veeraswamy. Now people began whispering about the arrival of the armed squad in Seethampet at any time and take revenge against Venkatadri and Deshmukh.

Meanwhile the police entered the village and took away madiga Latchaiah with them for interrogation. They tortured him mercilessly to find out the whereabouts of his sons. When his wife Muthamma protested they beat her to pulp and she became unconscious. They tied Latchaiah with jute ropes and sprinkled water over them. The knots became tight, causing severe pain to him.

But his answer to their queries was “I don’t know.” The police used all the available third degree methods in their textbook, hanged him upside down but the answer they got was the same. Finally, they left the village after demolishing the hut and leaving the couple half-dead.

People thought that Deshmukh must have complained to the police.

After a few days, Deshmukh received a letter.

“The day has come to put an end to your atrocities. No power in this world can save you and your henchmen.” That was the content of the letter.

Soon the police established a temporary outpost in the village. They enjoyed their stay with drink and food at the expense of people who were terrorized by them.

Deshmukh Karunakar Rao tried his best to convince the people that he had nothing to do with the police picket but people did not believe him.

His brothers requested him to leave the village but Karunakar Rao was adamant.

Sukhender Reddy came to Seethampet and pleaded him explaining the present trends. He said to his brother,

“You have great affection and love towards this village and we know it well. You had many dreams to develop this village. But these days are not for that. The villages are dying. These night warriors are more terrible than the Pindaries and highway men. The latter only robbed the people but the former were obsessed with the belief only in killing. Then why should we stay in these villages? Let these fertile lands go barren. Let our servants and farm workers suffer. Let all these cattle die. You must be alive. You alone can support everybody. Come on. Leave this bloody village.”

Sukhender Reddy is an upcoming politician. Experts say that he has the potential to become an MLA and even a minister. But he is hasty in making decisions which may be a minus point to his career.

One more month passed without any incident.

Venkatadri now stopped sleeping in his house. Every day he changed his place of rest. In spite of the assurances by the Deshmukh he is worried about his safety.

“These police people cannot protect me since I am on their hit list, sir”

“May be you die with fear but not by their axe,” said Deshmukh.

* * * *

After exactly one week, Venkatadri was attacked and killed on his way to the village from the neighbouring village by some unidentified persons.

There was a rumour about Yadaiah and Saraiah that they were among the assailants.

A letter reached the hands of Karunakar Rao warning him of the similar fate as that of Venkatadri.

All the relatives of the Deshmukh were of the opinion that the village was not a safe place for him to stay. Sukhender Reddy visited his brother and took Karunakar Rao and his wife to the city. To look after agriculture and property they appointed a supervisor.

His name is Vemuri Satyanarayana. He belongs to Guntur district. Long time ago he came to Seethampet. He purchased lands and got settled there. His expertise and knowledge in modern methods of agriculture brought him good name. By using quality seeds, pesticides and fertilizers he could obtain record yielding from his lands. Thus he became popular as the model ryot or farmer and was honoured by the government on two or three occasions. Many farmers in Seethampet village followed his methods and gained profits. Karunakar Rao was also in favour of Satyanarayana to look after his lands. In fact he believed that in the hands of a skilful farmer his lands would yield more production and profits. After the demise of Venkatadri he called Satyanarayana and handed over the responsibilities of his property to him.

“You supervise our lands and property. I’ll offer you one fourth of the profit. I’ll arrange the necessary capital,” said Karunakar Rao.

“Let me be the clerk or supervisor. But don’t call me as Serdar, sir,” said Satyanarayana.

Under the able supervision and expertise of Satyanarayana the lands yielded good crops. He used tractor to till lands, oil and electric motors to draw out water from the wells. Karunakar Rao though stayed in the town, as a farmer his heart was always with his property and lands in the village. He used to visit Seethampet at least once in a month and supervised the developmental activities in his lands.

Two years passed. In these two years, the police could gain some control over the extremists. A new party came to power in the state in the recent elections defeating the political party that was in power for a long time. The new Chief Minister decided to eliminate the revolutionaries completely.

He made available new sophisticated arms to the police force. He strengthened the police by making many draconian laws and giving them powers. The societies for human rights cried hoarse that this state had become a police state. In the encounters that followed many revolutionaries lost their lives. The police claimed that the encounters were real while civil liberties people condemned them as fake encounters. The police blamed the societies for human rights as partisan oriented as they always the supporters of the underground activists.

In an encounter between the revolutionaries and the police Veraswamy died while he was taking shelter in a shed near Seethampet village. The news spread like wild fire. Revolutionaries gave a statement that police after receiving the information from a traitor, arrested Veeraswamy at Vangala town and killed him in cold blood in the forest near Seethampet.

His body was handed over to his parents. Many people from the near by villages made a beeline to have a final look at the slain warrior. They hailed him as the one who sacrificed his life for the welfare of the poor people.

Journalists, poets, lawyers, social workers and intellectuals from all the four corners of the state turned up and expressed their concern and solidarity. They demanded an impartial inquiry by a sitting high court judge.

With the death of Veeraswamy, police announced that the activities of the revolutionaries had come to a halt. They had removed the police picket from Seethampet village.

Karunakar Rao also got relieved a little bit and increased his visits to his village. In the recent elections his brother Sukhender Reddy got elected as MLA But his party lost the majority so he could not become the minister.

After the encounter of Veeraswamy there was a considerable reduction in the activities of the revolutionaries. It was rumoured that the armed squad of Veeraswamy was completely destroyed and no other squad was active within the vicinity of the village. Nobody knew the whereabouts of Yadaiah and Saraiah who had worked earlier in that squad.

* * * *

It is November.

Harvest season. Fields yielded the paddy in plenty.

Karunakar Rao stayed in the village supervising the work in his paddy fields. He was immensely happy with the agricultural production that year. Satyanarayana made necessary arrangements right from harvesting the crops to collecting grain into bags.

In the midst of this situation one day evening Karunakar Rao started from his house to his fields, reciprocating the wishes

expressed by the people. His lands were almost by the side of the village at a working distance. The commotion and voices of the workers at his fields were clearly perceptible. When he was about to reach his fields he was confronted by five young people who looked like people of Vaddera, (the diggers) community. They were half-naked with a small cloth covering their bodies and axes on their shoulders. They were in their twenties

“I have never seen them. They must be strangers to this place,” thought Karunakar Rao.

“Who are you? Where do you come from?” inquired Karunakar Rao suspiciously.

“We don’t have a village of our own, sir.” They came close to him. “We hope that you would provide us with some job...” and at once they surrounded him and they raised their axes. Before he recognized that one of them was Yadaiah, the edges of axes pierced his head. Karunakar Rao tried to escape from this onslaught but there was a blow after blow on his head, chest, hands, legs and neck till he fell on the ground and died.

The assailants finished their job within minutes and disappeared from the scene as fast as they came. Though some people observed the ghastly incident, they did not dare to prevent it. Nobody dared to approach the dead body for a while.

After some time people working in his fields came to know of it and hurried to the place only to find the lifeless body still oozing thick red blood.

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By midnight the police arrived in the village. Relatives of Karunakar Rao had also arrived from far away places. The village was flooded with media people, politicians, officials and many other people of the town.

More than everybody Sukhender Reddy was upset by his brother’s murder. He cried in open and nobody could console

him. Seeing him in that state everybody had tears in their eyes. Karunakar Rao's funeral rites were performed in a grand scale. Amidst of flowers his body was kept and a big procession was held and his body was kept on the pyre of sandal wood and was lit by his eldest son Sukumar Reddy. Then what remained there at last was a fistful of ashes.

"It is all because of a few pieces of cow dung *pidakas*," muttered someone.

"Such a rich man with so much land... so many servants... so much affluence had to bother for a few pieces of animal waste. Incredible!"

"That's all because of that Serdar Venkatadri."

Deshmukh was good. But Venkatadri misguided him.

But Deshmukh supported him. That's why Yadaiah killed Venkatadri.

"Do you think whether this story ends here or not?"

"I don't think so. Because there may be many more such killings that follow... there seems to be no end to this human annihilation."

"The Police exercise their powers and sharpen their teeth. It is going to be their turn now."

"That's where the present world is heading today. The seer Veerabrahmendaswamy warned of this long time ago. He also predicted that actors would become the leaders and rule the land. And you know, he also prophecied the rule of a widow."

"Knowing that we all die and perish, why all these unabated killings?"

"Nobody will understand this. It is all His divine play."

"Do you think all these dead people will take rebirth again?"

“Why don’t you ask our Pundit? He always says about it in his sermons.”

“According to our past deeds we take our births as dog, pig or something else, he says.”

“What does he know? That’s all shit. To deceive the poor those so called sacred books were written...”

“They are all the creation of these selfish Brahmins...”

“Don’t insult them. You’ll lose your eye sight.”

“Nonsense! You won’t lose any thing. It is all mere propaganda by the high caste people.”

That’s how people in that village responded.

The next day the party to which Sukhender Reddy was affiliated conducted a big meeting in the memory of Karunakar Rao. They made it sure that a lot of people attended that meeting. Several leaders of other parties also participated. The police made elaborate arrangements for all of them.

They all praised Karunakar Rao as a great farmer and a patriot who donated much of his lands to the poor. They said that revolutionaries had done great injustice to the people of this Trilinga Island by killing such noble people. Sukhender Reddy spoke at length but in a furious way.

“My brother was a virtuous man. He hadn’t committed any injustice to anybody. Thousands of acres of land he donated to the poor. He gave away Two hundred acres when Vinoba was here, and another hundred during the Land Ceiling Act.

We each got twenty acres as our share and he was looking after agriculture staying in the village. We requested him many times to leave the village but he stayed back. He loved his lands. He loved his profession of agriculture to his heart’s content. He believed in staying in the village and providing work for the poor. He used to say that the farmer was the backbone of the country.

He always took great care of his workers. And they killed such a noble man, a patriot, an ideal farmer and a righteous man. God won't forgive them. This government ... what kind of government is this, which could not protect its senior citizen? Why these people have resorted to kill my brother? For a thing which he has not done, which was committed by our Serdar how can they kill my brother? What kind of people they are? Are they not demons in human disguise? The day will come one day when the same public will chase them out of their hide-outs. I won't keep quiet. I will see their end," he thundered.

When he finished his speech, Maruti Rao one of his close friends whispered in his ears: "Why did you speak like that? They may also make you as one of their targets."

"Let it happen. Let us see how many people they are going to kill. Are we not going to die one day? Let them kill me... me and my wife and the kids too..." he said loudly.

Maruti Rao felt embarrassed. He knew that Sukhender Reddy was a hard nut to crack.

"How these people will call themselves as revolutionaries? Does anybody believe that a true revolution is ever possible by these fanatic acts? If at all, the so called revolutions take place in a few remote villages, how long they last? They had already deviated from their actual goal of their revolution long ago.

It is not the development of the people they want. It is the poverty. If there is poverty then their party will flourish. That's why they never allow people to progress. They are mere bloodsuckers. Vampires of the night! Man eating tigers! People won't forgive these mafia gangs," said Sukhender Reddy shaking with anger.

"His fate is going to be the same as that of his brother" somebody among the audience murmured.

"Such a fury is not the desired quality of a politician," they thought.

“Maruti Rao is a good man. But his friendship with Sukhender Reddy may brew some trouble in future. The extremists may raise an axe upon him,” said a teacher.

The condolence meeting was over.

The family members of Karunakar Rao unanimously decided not to stay in that village and to stop the agriculture work in their farms. They dismissed all the workers from the service except two to look after the big house and the other one to take care of the cattle. All their lands turned barren because of noncultivation.

The Police established an outpost in Seethampet. Every day the armed police raided the nearby villages and apprehended the suspected youth and interrogated them by employing various methods of torture found in the police text. Many of Yadaiah’s friends were subjected to brutal torture to extract information about Yadaiah. Now it was almost difficult to live in Seethampet for the people below forty.

Fifteen days after the murder of Karunakar Rao, the police brought two young men below the age of twenty five to Seethampet village police outpost. But the next morning they were found dead under a banyan tree on the bank of the village tank.

Police announced that in the encounter between them and the revolutionaries two of the radicals were shot dead and police recovered at the spot one. 303 rifle, some bullets and other things. The police suspected that those two men might be the members of Yadaiah’s revolutionary squad.

The media the next day published the photos of the slain youth and the statements of the police.

People who were the silent witnesses of that incident maintained much restraint. But, they could not control their grief when they saw the dead bodies of the two young men. They said, “Whose children are these two young ones...? Do their parents know that their children are no more? How many more people

will die in these unabated killings? How many mothers have to lose their children in this mindless violence?”

“They are innocent and the children of the dead revolutionaries and police arrested them in Raghavapur village at night and brought them to Seethampet and they killed them in the cold blood as an act of revenge against the murder of Karunakar Rao. What police said is false and we demand a judicial enquiry on these ghastly incidents,” said the committee for the human rights and civil liberty. They formed a fact finding committee consisting of politicians of all parties, intellectuals, advocates and journalists. They enquired in the village but nobody in the village responded truthfully. “We heard some firing sounds at the mid night” ... said some people. Others were tight lipped. One could see the shades of fear on their faces. The invisible eyes of police were there all the time when the fact finding committee was on its job.

The fact finding committee declared that police brought two innocent men from the Raghavapur village and killed them brutally.

Since nobody claimed the dead bodies, police themselves cremated the bodies.

“We consider Sukhender Reddy is responsible for the death of the two innocent young men. So he has to be ready for the similar fate of his brother and he will die as a dog in the hands of the people.” was the statement issued by the revolutionaries.

Sukhender Reddy was provided with security by the police. But nobody could control his tongue. “This fact finding committee is a farce one,” he said. All its members are the henchmen of the revolutionaries. These so called committees for people’s rights and others are a mere shit. Do they think human rights are the sole property of the revolutionaries only? Are they the only human beings in this society? When those so called revolutionaries brutally killed my brother why were they remained silent then?

Even the death penalty imposed by the lower court is implemented only after the approval of the higher court. All these intellectual and learned people are fighting for the abolition of the death penalty. Then how come these social reformers allow such murders in cold blood?" Thus Sukhender Reddy expressed his opinions whenever he found a platform to speak upon. Every one of his relatives including his wife and children tried to keep him silent but in vain.

One day when he was leaving for the party workers meeting his wife Lalithamma and his eldest son Ramesh Reddy tried their best to stop him.

"Don't go outside for some time. Please stay at home and be peaceful. It is very difficult for you to control yourself in the meetings. We know that. You reveal your mind there and thereby it increases the enmity between you and the revolutionaries. We beg you. We don't need these politics to get on any more. By god's grace we have everything with us in plenty. Better if you resign this MLA post and be at home. Let us get out of this place," she pleaded him with tears in her eyes.

"Yes. Please go to America and stay with sister. Enjoy life. You can come back when once this nuisance is over. Dad! Why do we have the politics that shed blood only? Why should you go round these villages when your services are misunderstood? It seems to me that everybody has some sort of enmity or antagonism against you because you are born rich. Kindly heed to mother's advice and leave immediately for America," said Ramesh Reddy, his eldest son.

"Why do you all advise me like that? Do you think I am such a coward worried about a few night prowlers? My party people gave me a ticket to contest in the elections. The people of this constituency voted me to power as their representative believing my words that I would stay in the constituency and look after their problems. Do you think that it is right on my part to leave them to their fate and hide myself in a far away country? My

party has also placed some responsibilities over my shoulders. I cannot just put them aside and leave. This life is not important to me. If they want to kill me let them do so. Already they had killed many and I shall be another one amongst their trophies. If one person dies, it is a tragedy. If its more than one, it is mere statistics.” Thats’ what that cruel dictator Stalin had said. Statistics means mere numbers. It is only like counting with one’s fingers. Now it has become a daily ritual counting how many revolutionaries died, how many police men and how many innocent people died. But nobody mentions that how many lives were annihilated in this tragedy. Tomorrow it will be the same if I were to be killed. They add my number to the existing list of the MLAs killed before. May be you go on weeping for a few days because of this relationship. Then gradually, everything becomes past. Let them kill all. Let them rule this land after killing all of us. I’m not afraid of them. We knew that they would kill my Brother. My brother also knew that. In spite of it, was he shaken with fear? No, he was brave enough to face death. Let me die only once! Why ten times daily? Who is going to remain on this earth forever? The killers’ dream will never become true. We know it and they also know it,” said Sukhender Reddy in his usual style.

“It is immaterial whether they know it or not. For us it is you who is important. Let police take care of them. Suppose if you retire from the politics... then nothing will happen. There are lot many people who can fill your shoes. There is no dearth of politicians in this country. If you resign then another person will get a chance in the politics. So, please heed to our advice,” said Ramesh Reddy.

Ramesh Reddy has a degree in civil engineering. However, he preferred to be a contractor to an engineer. He take up many big contract works of the government.

“People have elected me for five years. I cannot do away with my responsibility and just immigrate to America in fear of life,” he said.

“Why are you so adamant like that?” questioned Ramesh Reddy.

“You don’t care for our words. You just don’t care whatever happens to us. You always talk about the people who treat you as alien. Only your party and people are important to you. Then there’s no point in my living here without you? I’ll die rather by jumping into a well than witnessing the eventual horror of seeing my husband’s death,” threatened Lalithamma.

“Dad, adjustability, that is what we need under these circumstances. We have to adjust ourselves with the prevailing circumstances. See! I myself wanted to become a software engineer and settle with a big job in America, but I became a Civil Engineer instead. Now I am settled as a contractor giving bribes to the all from top to bottom.

What can we do? The society is like that. I have to give percentages to the ministers concerned as well as the revolutionaries. Otherwise we cannot run the business. They consider us as class enemies but accept percentages from us. They need our money and we want our work to be completed without a hitch. That’s all. Other things are mere technical formalities. It is a matter of adjustment. Everything moves on by mutual adjustment. Your temporary withdrawal from the politics will also be a strategy, an adjustment. If you do that then there will be no harm to you. You must consider this,” said Ramesh Reddy.

“I do not have that kind of adjustability. Better you leave me for I cannot change my way of living and principles. Government has provided me with good security. Nothing will happen to me. Even if some thing happens, then I consider that god has given me only that much of life-span. It is his will that makes the things happen” saying so he left the room to meet his followers waiting in the drawing room and then went outside along with them. The two gunmen who were appointed for his protection also followed him.

“We cannot change him,” said Lalithamma wiping tears off her cheek.

“This sort of obstinacy is there in their genes itself. His brother also was like that. He also did not care our advice to him. We have to be contented with whatever is happening. That’s all,” saying so Ramesh Reddy also left the place.

* * * *

Two months have passed.

Hakimpet is another village adjacent to Seethampet. A marriage function was being held at a grand level on that day in that village. It seemed as though people from all over the Trilinga Island arrived there by cars, tractors, jeeps and bullock carts. The dust raised by those vehicles created clouds in the vicinity of the village.

Tents were erected to accommodate at least ten thousand people in the empty land adjacent to the Hakimpet village. A platform was constructed to allow people to witness the marriage function from a distance. It was decorated with fresh roses and jasmines brought from the city. The marriage was the talk of the village and people compared it with the marriage ceremony of Sita and Rama of the epic times. Everybody who came there knew that it was the marriage of the daughter of the local MLA of Hakimpet, Mr. Maruti Rao. He and Sukhender Reddy were very intimate friends. They both belonged to the same political party. Therefore, everybody expected Sukhender Reddy to attend that marriage ceremony. The whole area was under the surveillance of CRPF who were in large number.

Maruti Rao had a great name as the true leader of the people. It is because of this relentless efforts that the all round development of the constituency was possible. His constituency was provided with the facilities like Roads, buses, electricity, electric motors to the agriculture wells, co operative banks, schools with nice buildings and with such many other things. His

constituency had become a model to the other constituencies. His protest with fast-unto-death forced the government to sanction Sri Rama sagar project to that area. Because of that canal the economic level of thousands of poor farmers was improved. That is the reason why he was elected three times from that constituency.

Maruti Rao was the childhood classmate of Sukhender Reddy. His father was a small farmer. Sukhender Reddy helped him to build up his career. People say that Sukhender Reddy was responsible for the upcoming of Maruthi Rao.

Sukhender Reddy offered Maruti Rao financial aid to complete his education. Both of them passed B.A. with good marks and later they entered the political arena. Maruthi Rao, belonged to the backward class community and there were more people of his caste in Hakimpet constituency and so he was given the party ticket to contest from Hakimpet. Sukhender Reddy helped him by all means for the latter's victory. Thus he became the people's representative when he was only thirty years of age. Many people thought he would become a minister.

But he was still young then and so he was not given that chance at that time. Thus their friendship grew stronger and stronger in the last twenty five years. Later, in the next elections Sukhender Reddy also got elected to Legislative Assembly.

On that day morning at 11 o'clock the road from Vangala town to Hakimpet was busy with all the vehicles going towards Hakimpet. A white Ambassador car was also one among them. It was moving very fast but was suddenly surrounded by four young men with AK47 guns who at once started firing without warning. Bullets from their guns smashed the windows of the car and pierced the heads of the travellers in it. The sudden assault made the car change its course which made it overturned upside down four times and crashed into the trees with a bang. Four people inside the car died on the spot and the other two started crying with the fear of death.

Believing that Sukhender Reddy was travelling in that car, the revolutionaries attacked the car. Srisailam, one of the travellers who observed them coming out of bushes with guns in their hands, made an attempt to tell them that they were not the politicians but everything happened within a few seconds. “We are not politicians. Don’t kill us. Don’t do us any harm,” he was crying till the last. Those young gunmen suspected something amiss and stopped firing and disappeared into the wilderness.

The car’s front part was completely smashed in that assault. Two of the travellers Srisailam and Yadagiri inside the car were the teachers but survived the attack. A car and a tractor which were moving behind the ill fated car stopped there stunned by that sudden incident.

The Police reached the place and pulled out the men who were either alive or dead from the car and shifted them to the government hospital at Vangala town.

That news spread like wild fire and reached Hakimpet. By that time the marriage was over and the guests were heading towards the dining hall for dinner.

“It seems revolutionaries fired at Sukhender Reddy who is on his way to this marriage”

“See! How dare these people are? They can kill anybody if they wish so?” people were discussing these points while having their lunch feast.

“How many died? Only Sukhender Reddy or others too?”

“Let us finish the food. Feast first, later fight!” People were integrated in filling their bellies more than anything else at that time.

Maruti Rao was aghast. He turned pale. His knees trembled and he fell on the ground. People around him made a big scene with their cries and everybody came running there in anxiety. After some time Maruti Rao got himself up and enquired about the facts.

He was informed that four innocent people lost their lives in that attack. Luckily Sukhender Reddy was not present in the car. To know about those who lost their lives while coming to attend his daughter's marriage Maruti Rao went to Vangala town and visited the hospital. When he saw the dead bodies his heart skipped a beat.

9

Thimmapuram was a village situated at a distance of hundred kilometers from Vangala town. Like many other villages in Trilinga Island it was also not a much developed one. Only recently a single teacher's school was sanctioned to that village. Seshaiah was the only person who could read and write to some extent. Thus, he became a very valuable and prominent person in the whole village.

In that village, some are land owners, while others are mostly dependent upon the caste based professions. Seshaiah was one of the landlords. Though he had fifty acres of dry land and thirty acres of wet-land, he is not a very rich farmer. Reason being that the village is entirely dependent upon the rains to fill up the three or four lakes. The inadequate water sources hampered the development of that village. Millets used to be the main crop and the staple food too for the people of that village. Very few used to enjoy the luxury of having rice as their daily meals. Some people tried to dig up wells for water. Their efforts backfired when big layers of rocks made further digging impossible. Thus, they were incurred by great losses. Seshaiah was also one among such losers.

Seshaiah's maternal relatives were well off economically. Their village had good resources of water. So they had two crops a year. His maternal uncles were educated in town in those days and so they got good jobs. Seshaiah too stayed there for a while and learnt... some Urdu, Telugu, and mathematics.

Seshaiah always considered and revered his uncles as the most gifted ones. They seemed to him like gods descended from

the heaven. The mannerism of their talk and walk was just unique to him. Their language, style of walking and manners were just out of the world. So, he also wished to go to Vangala town for education. But his father did not allow him to do so as Seshaiah being the only son to him. He always insisted upon him to stay in the village looking after their lands. When Seshaiah approached his mother, she expressed the same opinion that his father would not allow him to go to town for studying. His father was firmly against working under somebody as he thought it was nothing but slavery. He used to boast with others that his son would do agriculture, but would never degrade himself by working under somebody. "What is there in a government job? It is nothing but slavery. It is not something like our farm where we have farm workers, shed full of cattle, two or three bullock carts, many servants around my son coming and going, pomp and prestige... all are possible only with agriculture. We feed others. Such strong opinionated and convictions of his father deprived him of proper education. This unfulfilled ambition remained with him for ever.

Seshaiah lost his father when he was only fifteen. Suddenly when he died of heart attack there was a rumour that he was ostracized by his farm servant, whose wife had illicit relationship with his father. That farm servant knew black magic and so he killed him with it. After his father's death the entire burden of family fell upon him. So he lost the opportunity of getting further education and was busy with his agriculture. His mother got him married at the age of eighteen.

Seshaiah was a good and kind hearted soul. He looked after his farm workers very well. His kindness created problems to him and his nature of gullibility brought him losses in agriculture. He also lost some money in the process of digging wells and his strong belief in astrologers and water diviners ruined his financial position severely. As a result of this he lost interest in agriculture. Literally, he wanted to run away from this mire of loans and interests and tiresome work of agriculture.

He was blessed with two sons, Ravinder the elder one and Narender the younger one. He firmly decided to give them good education. They were admitted into local schools at first. Later Ravinder was shifted to Rayagiri as the local school had education only up to third standard. Ravinder completed his seventh class staying at Rayagiri in a rented room, self-cooking. However, at last, he completed his seventh class with great difficulty

Though Seshaiah was advised by his maternal uncles to join his sons in the schools of Hyderabad, he realized that it was beyond his capacity. So he preferred Rayagiri to Hyderabad for his sons' education.

He used to visit the school frequently to enquire about his son's progress with the teachers there, and any good word about his son always elevated his spirits.

"What about his score in maths? Is he good at Mathematics?" he enquired with the mathematics teacher.

"OK, he is good. I told him to choose maths as an optional subject after seventh class. You join him in a good high school. I am sure he will come up with true colours," the teacher replied.

"Do you think my son will definitely get a government job? Tell me the truth, sir. If not, I have no choice except to discontinue him from his studies," said Seshaiah.

"No, don't do that. He is quite good at mathematics. Once he completes his matriculation he can join engineering course," said that teacher.

"So he gets a government job, doesn't he?" Seshaiah asked again.

"Yes, the government job. The future belongs to engineers. Once when he becomes an engineer, your luck will change. Your house will be filled with gold and a lot of money," said that teacher encouragingly.

“Let it be so, sir. Your blessings to my son will definitely win him that position. I will sell whatever I have to make my sons engineers,” said Seshaiah.

So he brought his son to Vangala town and met the headmaster of the school as his uncles advised him. The headmaster denied him a seat as all the seats were already filled up. So innocent he is, that he suggested the headmaster that if there were no seats, he would as well bring a new seat made by the carpenter to let his son sit in the class.

The headmaster and his staff laughed at this suggestion and explained him of the situation and suggested him to approach a private school where seats were still available.

“You haven’t understood what we say. Seat means not that wooden seat. Go outside and enquire about private schools. There you can join your son. And do not waste our time with your stupid suggestions,” the headmaster said disgustingly.

Seshaiah got hurt by the rudeness but went into the town and enquired about the private schools. In that process he came across a person who is known to him and under his guidance, he admitted his son into Andhrabhivardhini School. There he had to pay around ten rupees towards tuition fee and etc. Ten rupees was a big amount in those days.

He searched for two days for a rented room in Vangala town and with the help of local friends; he could get one for his son to stay. After arranging everything for his cooking, he left for Thimmapuram.

Ravinder was happy with that school. He liked the way the mathematics teacher taught. The teacher also took special interest to teach mathematics to Ravinder.

However, Seshaiah had few drawbacks. Agricultural income began dwindling. His financial condition had also gone from bad to worse. He had four daughters after his sons. He had to sell some part of his land to maintain that big family.

Ravinder obtained good marks in matriculation. He opted MPC for his Intermediate course. Seshaiah had to sell out five more acres of land. His second son, Narender was also good at studies. Ravinder got an engineering seat in a private college. The price of land was very low in those days. Thousand rupees per an acre was the price for dry land, wet lands where rice was grown fetched upto ten thousand rupees per an acre. Due to the Land Ceiling Act also he had to forego some more land which he inherited from his forefathers.

Ravinder completed his B.E. in civil engineering and started searching for a job. But it seemed to be a distant dream for him to become an engineer because of the competition among the engineering graduates. There was much unemployment among them due to ever increasing number of engineering graduates every year.

Raghava Rao, the son of Patwari of that village has considerable clout in the ruling party circles. He assured Ravinder of a job. But he expected some money for such favour. Seshaiah accepted the offer and went along with Raghava Rao to meet Maruthi Rao, the MLA of their constituency.

They were well received by the MLA and Raghava Rao introduced Maruthu Rao to the MLA and explained to him the purpose of their visit.

“Our friend Seshaiah’s son passed his BE with a first division. For his son’s education, Seshaiah had to sell large part of his property. Now he hopes to see his son settle in a suitable job. We pray you to use your influence with the concerned minister and see that his son gets a government job,” requested Raghava Rao.

“Nowadays, it is very difficult to get a job. Many formalities have to be completed. Which branch of BE his son has done?” asked Maruti Rao.

“Civil engineering, sir,” replied Seshaiah.

“Then OK! Soon there will be a notification regarding the posts of Assistant Engineers in Public Works Department. Let your son apply. Once the written test is over, the qualified candidates will be called for the interview. You may inform me once when you receive the call letter. Then I will try my level best to help you,” said Maruti Rao.

“Sir, I will bear the expenses. Kindly see that my son gets this job. All the members of my family will be indebted and grateful to you forever” requested Sessaiah.

“Now do not worry about the expenses. First, see that your son takes the written exam. Once he gets through it and receives an interview letter then you can come to me for the next step from where I can help you out,” said Maruti Rao.

After taking leave of the MLA they left for Thimmapuram.

Two months later the Public Works Department (PWD) issued a notification for the posts of Assistant Engineers (AEs). Ravinder applied for that. They conducted a written test in which he was qualified and got a call letter for the interview. With the interview letter in his hand Ravinder approached Raghava Rao along with his father.”

“Well done Ravinder! Take it that, you’ve got the job. Come on! Let us go to our MLA” congratulated Raghava Rao.

“Today?” anxiously asked Sessaiah.

“Yes, today itself if you are ready with money!”

“How much do we need?”

“Twenty-five thousand rupees! I told you last time. Our work is to be done with the help of minister,

“It’s too much!” exclaimed both the son and the father.

“What do you think of an AE post? You won’t it get free,” said Raghava Rao.

“Why? This is not good. I passed my B.E. with a first class. Did well in the written test too! I am very optimistic that I will get this job purely on my merit. Then why should I pay twenty five thousand rupees. It’s quite unjustified!?” said Ravinder.

“It’s up to you to decide. If you are not ready somebody else will grab this opportunity and gain by it. That is the way these things are done nowadays.”

“Sir, please don’t take his words seriously. I shall arrange the money by tomorrow,” said Seshaiiah.

“Come ready with money by tomorrow morning. We shall leave by first bus,” said Raghava Rao. Taking leave of Raghava Rao they left for their home. On the way Ravinder argued against paying such huge amount to Raghava Rao. He said that half of that amount would go into the pockets of this middle man.

“It’s immaterial for us as to whom this money goes. But you must get the job. I will arrange the money for it,” Sheshaiah said to his son.

“But how? You were already into neck deep debts. Where can you get such a huge amount in such a short notice?” asked Ravinder.

“I am going to dispose those two acres of wetland. Any how you, are not going stay in our village to look after agriculture in future, are you?” said Seshaiiah.

“What about my sisters’ marriage? Where do you get money for their marriages?”

“Both of you have to look into that. When you get the job you should give first priority to your sister’s marriage”

“Why don’t you listen to me? I will get this job on my own. I will do my best in the interview. You need not pay anybody single paise,” said Ravinder.

But Seshaiah went ahead and took an advance amount on his land and some amount as loan borrowed from the local money lender.

The next morning they went to see the MLA who received them warmly. He was highly pleased to see the interview letter. Raghava Rao explained everything in his confidential meeting with the MLA.

Maruti Rao the MLA came out and said, “Your son seems to be very intelligent. There’s no need of any recommendations for a first class student like him who will get the job on his own merit. There’s no doubt about it, and no need of money for that. Just give me your details. I will find out with the PWD minister about your son’s status in the list. Unless it is necessary, I won’t use your money. One thing I must clarify, I don’t take money from anybody.”

“Sir, keep this money with you. That gives us some confidence and a hope,” said Seshaiah.

“OK but I shall return you the money if your son gets this job on his own,” said Maruti Rao accepting the money.

* * * *

Ravinder faced the interview and he did well in it. The results were announced immediately and the list of the selected candidates was displayed. Ravinder was one among the selected in the list. After ten days he received the appointment order as Assistant Engineer. Everybody in the family was happy and felt that all their problems would be solved soon.

“I got this job purely on merit. You have unnecessarily wasted twenty-five thousand rupees on it,” said Ravinder to his father.

“No! Our MLA is very principled and honest man. It’s because of him that you’ve got this job. May be we have paid some money towards expenses. Nevertheless, you have got the

job. That's what we wanted. There are people who receive bribes but fail to deliver the goods. In that sense our MLA is hundred times better than others," argued Seshaiah.

"That is what we all accept as a norm and graft is growing day by day with an enormous speed without check," said Ravinder.

Ravinder joined the job within a week. After a few days, one evening a jeep stopped in front of the house of Seshaiah. Maruti Rao accompanied by Raghava Rao came out of the jeep and went to Sheshaiah Maruti Rao returned Rupees Twenty Five thousands to Sheshaiah saying that Ravinder had got his job on his own.

"My son has got this job because of you, sir. I won't forget this help in my life,," said Seshaiah with a deep sense of gratitude.

"I did nothing in your son's case. That's why I have come to return the money," said Maruti Rao.

"You must have incurred some expenses, sir. Kindly keep the money with you," requested Seshaiah.

"No. thanks. You must have borrowed the money from someone as loan. Pay it off," saying so the MLA went away with his entourage.

Seshaiah was deeply moved by Maruthi Rao's gesture. This is first time in his life seeing such honest people of noble conduct. He never ever imagined that money paid once to the politicians would be returned by them. He narrated the whole incident to his son.

"He is really great. It is very unusual. He must be a rare person among the politicians," said Ravinder.

"Say, he is like God. That's why people revere him very much," said Seshaiah. Thus they adored him and remained ardent followers to the MLA since then.

On the day of Maruti Rao's daughter's marriage Seshaiiah hired a white Ambassador car and started along with his sons Ravinder and Narendra and teachers Srisailam and Yadagiri from his village Thimmapuram. Their car stopped for a while due to some problems in its radiator and they continued their journey after the problem got rectified. The ghastly incident took place when they almost reached Hakimpet, their destination

Both the cars and their numbers were almost similar to each other and it was the due time for the Sukhender Reddy's car to reach the same place, when this unfortunate incident took place. "We express our deep regrets to the bereaved families and in future, we will take care of such things and see that they are not repeated. But we warn that the traitor of the people Sukhender Reddy that he cannot escape from the hands of the revolutionaries," Thus stated the revolutionaries in their statements released to media.

Sukhender Reddy took the last minute decision to attend the marriage of his friend's daughter. His family members were against his going to that village as it was infested with extremists. But Sukhender Reddy decided to attend the marriage and on the way his sixth sense prevailed and he returned home without attending the marriage.

"He has some more days left to live in this world. That's why he put off his journey," commented someone.

"The revolutionaries noticed his car leaving the house but did not expect that he would return home in the middle of the journey."

"He is lucky this time. Do you think he will survive in the next attack?"

"They are clear about their strategy. No doubt he will be killed."

"He will survive if he leaves the country."

“He said he would not leave the country. Whether he is alive or dead ... that’s only in this country”

“They all will say like that. But who wants to die?”

“It is a mistake. Please forgive us they say. But, can they bring back the lives of the dead? What will happen to the family members of the deceased? It will be a living hell for them.”

“It is not an intentional mistake. Because of the communication gap this mishap has taken place.”

“Maruti Rao is almost a god to that Seshaiah and his family. He returned the money which was paid to meet the expenses in getting job to his son.”

“Nowadays it is a rare thing in politics. Maruti Rao is really great.”

“In politics, how can one manage without receiving bribes or money in one way or the other?”

“May be he has his sources. He won’t take single paise from the poor. Probably he gets his share from the rich. That’s why he is revered by one and all in this area. He was elected at least three times from this constituency.”

“He is very close to Sukhender Reddy. Revolutionaries may not like it.

“The Revolutionaries usually do no harm to the popular leaders like him.”

Thus people in Hakimpet village talked about the incident.

Many repercussions were expected.

Public memory is very short.

People forgot this incident soon.

But Seshaiah’s family was completely ruined.

Unable to bear these misfortunes Seshaiah’s died of heart attack.

10

As retaliation to that incident the police arrested four young men and shot them dead in the forest near Hakimpet village and announced that the four revolutionaries were killed in the encounter between them and the revolutionaries. The dead bodies of those unfortunate youth were not identified by none. So they were cremated by the police themselves.

“I expected it. They will kill each other in this way to settle their scores on equal terms. This process comes to an end only when everybody in this Trilinga Island is killed,” said Radha Krishna, the head master of the school in the village.

“The police have become reckless. You cannot find a single young man of twenty in the villages today. If one is suspected as revolutionary by next day his dead body will be found in the forest. How much noise these committees for people’s rights may make, who cares? The police continue to attack brutally the innocent youth in the name of suspects,” said Sivakumar a teacher in that school.

“What might be the reason behind this situation? Both sides have become impassionate about the rights of the people. ‘If you kill one, we will kill two’ is the slogan uttered and practised by both groups. The Government has given full powers to the police. No law. No respect for the constitution and these revolutionaries do not believe in the constitution. They prefer the bullet to the ballot. If they contest in the elections, people will definitely caste their vote to them either because of fear or love. If they win they will form the government and help the poor. They can establish their rule and implement the programs based on their own ideology. What is that they are going to gain by these sporadic shootings and killings? Government has more fire power, arms and resources. How can you win over such formidable enemy? The world is changing fast. These revolutionaries must rethink about their strategy,” said Radha Krishna.

“May be you are right. But no amount of weapons can subdue the will of the people,” said Sivakumar.

“Where are such people in the present times? Everybody is selfish, self-centred and self-oriented. To earn money by any means is the principle and the criteria. The government is creating a false impression that it is for the poor. In reality, most of the government resources are spent on the salaries of its employees. The entire amount meant for the public welfare is going into the pockets of officials, business people, contractors, and politicians. Under these circumstances who is going to come forward to fight against the government. People want quick results today. Who has such strength and stamina to stand and fight for the poor for a long time? Who is there to sacrifice his present life for the benefit of his posterity? People of those days were different. Now it is the modern society of cable, television and computers. People are imitating the rich in their daily lives. Consumerism has reached its zenith. Electronic goods and vehicles have become part of one’s life. In this scenario, who is going to think about the society?” said Radha Krishna.

“All this invasion of television channels and computerization is the creation of American imperialism. Cultural imperialism has taken the place of political imperialism.

This is more dangerous. All our traditions, art and literature are going to be washed away by the flood of westernization,” said Sivakumar.

“But see! All these people who cried hoarse of American imperialism and cultural imperialism have sent their children to America. Why such double standards? You’ll accept their dollars but detest their culture. You must understand that the money is tagged with their culture. Moreover, it becomes the status symbol one day. We are big hypocrites. Under these circumstances how do you expect a revolutionary movement to arise and become successful? The contemporary society is a witness to several changes taking place now. The number of people dependent upon

agriculture is gradually dwindling with the coming of machines into agriculture. Service sector is now leading in providing jobs. Consumerism is at its peak. Public sector units, once the symbols of socialism, have become white elephants incurring heavy losses. Slowly all these units will be closed down or handed over to the private sector. If so, who wants socialism or revolution?" said Radha Krishna.

"Man lives in hope with hope. Especially the one who believes in socialism! He believes that if not today or tomorrow or after ten or hundred years, revolution becomes successful and this capitalistic society has inbuilt seeds of destruction in itself. He believes in the relentless struggle, which only can bring the change and for that this war is necessary for such a change," said Sivakumar.

They continued their discussions until late night. Not only these two, but also many people in the Trilinga Island had discussed and predicted the outcome of this no win situation. On the other side, scores of people from both sides were dying in the so-called encounters. Over six months had passed with only minor skirmishes.

Another six months elapsed without any major incident. Then the police made an announcement that the revolutionary movement had become weak because of their constant vigilance.

* * * *

Those days he was only the big leader in Vangara town. Whole Trilinga Island used to be under his control. "I am the kingdom and the kingdom is mine" was his attitude. His name is Ramakrishna Rao. Old age got him. Unable to move outside, he declared an end to his political career. Young people who stepped into the political arena began their own strategies keeping him at bay. Sensing the situation, he began to spend time away from politics.

One day when Ramakrishna Rao was in his house, two unidentified people shot him dead and disappeared.

The suspicion was naturally on the revolutionaries. The police declared that all the evidence pointed towards the extremists who made this cruel act as a desperate measure to prove their presence. They said that it was a cowardly act killing an old man who retired from the active politics.

“It is a great blow to the democracy. It is the worst example of the violation of human rights. These so called revolutionaries committed a big mistake by killing a senior citizen who was also a freedom fighter, a relentless warrior who fought for the democratic values of the society and a great patriot, these so called revolutionaries made a big mistake. It is just to prove their decimal existence these people resorted to such ghastly act,” said the ruler of the Trilinga Island.

“A dastardly act,” said Sukhender Reddy.

“It is to incite the ruler who was the disciple of the slain leader,” said someone.

“Why have they killed the old man?” a few intellectuals reacted.

“Now they have killed one. Tomorrow they will kill another one in retaliation. How can a disciple who is also the present ruler keep quiet when his master himself was shot dead? Definitely there will be some repercussions,” predicted some others. As usual, the statements flowed from various quarters.

* * * *

Raghava Reddy was a middle class farmer who passed matriculation in those days. He was also well versed in Urdu language. When the Trilinga Island was under the rule of Muslim kings, his proficiency in Urdu made him a celebrity. He used to act as an interpreter to the Urdu officials.

Raghava Reddy used to be very active in helping others right from his childhood. He joined Andhra Mahasabha in 1940's and when it was split into two, he took the side of the militants. He fought against the local landlords and Deshmukhs. He protected many people from the atrocities committed on them by Rajakars. He killed many Rajakars who committed crimes. Later when the armed struggle was called off he represented the communists and became an MLA. He always worked for the welfare of the poor. Though he was defeated in the next elections, he continued his career in politics as a political activists. In sixties, when the

When Communist party was again split into as CPI and CPIM, he joined the second one.

He was active in politics for some time but the rapid changes in the society and in his personal life changed him. He thought that the parliamentary path taken up by the communist parties was a big mistake. He came to the conclusion that they could achieve nothing by this system. For him this Trilinga Island appeared like a serious patient needing a radical surgery.

There were also some trials and tribulations in his personal life. His sons completed Engineering courses and joined government jobs but later they migrated to America against his wish. Raghava Reddy who was quite against America and who worked all his life against that capitalistic country could not digest this fact. He was astonished to see many of his colleagues' kith and kin also taking the same route.

He sold all the property that remained with him and bought a house in Kareemabad and decided to spend his last days peacefully. He and his wife were the only members in that house. Even in his youth most of his time he was away. Some mid-night meetings in disguise in order to avoid detection by Rajakars and their henchmen were the greatest occasions of his personal life. Even after becoming an MLA he could not spend much time with his wife. Always busy... with politics, with people who always

came for favours... he could not do proper justice to his wife. Now, he started his life from a fresh mode dividing his time between his beloved wife and the books he liked.

One day his old friend Purushotham came to meet him. Both were classmates and belonged to the villages side-by-side. Purushotham had studied only up to seventh class. Both of them joined Andhra Mahasabha and participated in the armed struggle. Later they took two different paths. Purushotham joined Kurangeese party and became MLA twice. But he was unlucky the third time. Later, he changed the party. He started a local party but he could not organise it well. Later he announced his retirement from the active politics. Raghava Reddy was surprised to see his old friend at this time.

“Why don’t you join the Human Rights Society to fight for the people’s rights?” asked Purushotham.

“I am quite old now and I want to live peacefully. Neither the society nor the party needs my services. I do not want to join in any of these two. What I understand now is that no one can change this society. Many philosophers, prophets, reformists tried their best to reform this world. But what happened? Nothing has been changed. The egoism, selfishness, revenge, intolerance, the unmitigated desire for destruction... all is intact. Countless revolutions and movements of reformation have come and gone, still there has been no change. This is my belief. At this age I do not want to join in any of these societies or politics. I think it is better to give this opportunity to young men who can serve the society in a better way,” said Raghava Reddy.

“They do all the ground work. We have to guide them. Many people think you are the right man for this post. They wish you to be the president of this district committee. Tomorrow it is going to be formed. Many people of the state committee are going to participate in that meeting. You must attend the meeting. I’ve come all the way to this place to inform you,” said Purushotham about the formation of Human Rights Society and request you to be its president.

“Tell me about this society in detail,” asked Raghava Reddy.

“People belong to all political parties, intellectuals, members from the voluntary organizations, advocates, social workers and others are the members in it. The main responsibility of these members is to protect the rights provided to individuals by the constitution and to see the government not violating them. For example, everybody in this country has a right to live, right to express their opinions. But most of the times the government violates them by killing the people in false encounters. The very police who are supposed to protect the lives of people are indulging themselves in false encounters. That’s why whenever the police resort to such cruel acts which are unconstitutional, the society for people’s rights intervenes and enquires into the facts by forming a fact finding committee. Many times we are blamed with a question that we always respond to the police encounters and enquire about the facts but why don’t we respond in the same tone to the murders committed by the revolutionaries? The answer is that it is the responsibility of the police to apprehend the people who commit crimes and see that they are punished by the court of law. It is their duty. They should honour the law... they should protect the law... but they should take law into their hands. If the police take the law into their hands then there is no need of so many law courts. The police cannot act as a judge. To bring these police excesses to the notice of the public, this society for people’s rights has been formed.

It has no relation with any other political party. Anybody can join this organisation. We are all of the opinion that a person like you with good public relations for so long is a suitable candidate for the post of the president of this district committee,” said Purushotham.

“Give me some time,” said Raghava Reddy.

“Take your own time. You are welcome to the public meeting that is to be held at the town hall tomorrow at 10’o clock in the morning,” said Purushotham. He left after having a cup of tea with Rghava Reddy.

Raghava Reddy was in a dilemma for some time whether to join this society or to rest at home. The spirit of fighting in him was still alive. He thought that any sort of help to the society from an individual was to be welcomed. Therefore, he attended the meeting. The meeting was also attended by many eminent people especially lawyers, journalists, teachers, writers, poets and representatives from various political parties. Leaders who arrived from the capital city explained to the public about the fundamental rights and how these rights were being suppressed by the present governments. They were also told that if such attitude continued the people in the Trilinga Island had to face the same atrocities which people of Europe faced during the Fascist and Nazi rule.

At the end of the session, the elections were conducted. Raghava Reddy was unanously elected as the president. Purushotham as vice-president, a young advocate Prabhanjankumar as secretary and a lecturer Manmohansingh as joint secretary were also elected.

Prabhanjankumar is a voracious orator. His lectures are packed with intense emotion and he spared nobody in his speeches. He always stressed about the need of a major change, a radical surgery to remove the inequalities from the society and armed struggle only can bring that result.

People thought that Raghava Reddy's joining the society for people's rights is like the experience itself joining hands with the emotions of Prabhanjankumar. The society did work well for three years. Wherever there was an encounter Prabhanjankumar appeared at that place and issued a statement condemning it as a false encounter. A fact-finding committee was formed to look into the truthfulness of the encounter on visiting the place of the encounter. A statement was issued that in its investigation it was proved that it was a false encounter.

Raghava Reddy as president, his involvement was limited to chair the important meetings or the press conferences. Prabhanjankumar was the key person who managed the show

without any hitch. Even Raghava Reddy had doubts about the role of Prabhanjankumar. He even suspected links between revolutionaries and Prabhanjankumar and discussed the issue with Purushotham. His friend also agreed with him. They thought having a young blood in the society always keeps it active.

Raghava Reddy was surprised when Ramakrishna Rao the stalwart and elderly politician was killed. He did not understand the necessity or usefulness to the struggle of revolutionaries in killing him. Purushotham also expressed the same was the opinion expressed by Purushotham.

The day after the murder of Ramakrishna Rao some unknown persons entered the house of Raghava Reddy and shot him from point blank at the mid-night hour.

“They are the police but not unidentified persons” many people thought.

“Yes. They are, definitely, the police. They have to pay a heavy price for this,” thundered Prabhanjankumar.

Purushotham remained speechless.

Raghava Reddy’s wife fell unconscious.

Many violent incidents took place soon after the killing of Raghava Reddy. A general bandh was observed in Kareemabad district.

There were incidents of stone throwing, burning of the R.T. C. buses and the telephone exchanges. Some mandal revenue offices were destroyed by bombs and mines. Several government vehicles were damaged. The police opened fired at the public who gathered in large numbers. Two people were dead according to official announcements but the unofficial number was around ten. The political analysts were of the opinion that this spontaneous reaction indicated the respect Raghava Reddy commanded among the people.

“The anti-social elements and the revolutionaries worked together hand in glove and created this havoc. As the police had no alternative in dispersing the unruly mobs, they fired at them as a last resort. The government is willing to conduct judicial enquiry into the murder of Raghava Reddy,” said the official spokesman.

“Raghava Reddy was a thorough gentleman. He had no enemies. He left the politics long time ago and was leading a quiet and peaceful life. He was never at loggerheads with others. How such a righteous man could become a target to be eliminated?” said Purushotham.

“This cold blooded murder is an act of revenge. They killed the elderly gentleman politician Ramakrishna Rao. So these people have found an easy target in another gentleman of the past who has sympathy over revolutionary methods. Where is the question of justice or injustice? Tit for tat. That’s all. Who cares about the law and order? If the institution, which is to safeguard the law and order acts itself in this way then who will save this country?” said Ajay Kumar, a senior advocate.

“I never thought that such a peace loving individual would be harmed by anyone. With this incident, I have lost confidence even in the word humanity,” Lamented Purushotham.

“There is nothing to wonder about the murder of Raghava Reddy in a society where Gandhi was killed. Present society is so desensitized that there is no shock effect on it. It is a dangerous situation. When a society reaches a stage where it fails to voice against the atrocities, it means it is in a decadent stage,” said Ajay Kumar. He worked for sometime in the society for people’s rights. But when he suspected that this has something to do with serious politics, he began to maintain some distance from its activities.

“I never expected that Raghava Reddy had any enemies. I am responsible for his joining this committee. I have committed a great blunder by persuading him into the active politics. This

mistake will continue to haunt me throughout my life,” said Purushotham weeping

Ajay Kumar and Purushotham were distant relatives. Whenever Purushotham finds some leisure, he spends time with Ajay Kumar.

“See! How easy it has become nowadays to kill people. It is something like squatting a mosquito or a fly! Both sides are doing the same. I do not understand how the revolution would be possible only with a handful of gun trotting young men in such a vast country. If they kill one, police force is retaliating with ten. Even if they kill a few, do you think, that can completely solve the problem of class enemies, politicians, police informers and police? If you burn and destroy the buses who is going to suffer by that? Where are we heading for? I am not surprised to see this democracy which exists merely for its namesake, replaced by military dictatorship,” said Ajay Kumar.

“What about the present situation? This is also a kind of military dictatorship. We call them police—the protectors of our society, but on the field everywhere one can see the CRPF; the greyhound force; and the special task force personnel. To suppress the revolutionary movement this government is spending huge amounts in training these so called security forces. If that amount is spent upon the measures to remove poverty then it will be more beneficial to the society. As long as the government considers this as a law and order problem no solution is found,” said Purushotham.

“I now strongly believe that it is impossible to find a solution to this problem in any perspective. At the initial stages it may be a problem limited to the socio- economic zone, now it rested with its turn as the problem to control the political power. Some limited power is there in the hands of these revolutionaries. Nevertheless, most of the power is rested with the ruling government. So there are now two power centres. One power wants to destabilize the ruling government. The other one which

is vested with the government wants to remove and decimate the splinter groups of these revolutionaries by its foot.

The elections may be rigged but when the power is in their hands no party wishes to lose it. Because the power has come through the ballot it has the sanctity of the constitution. Though in small scale, some revolutionary parties have hold over some villages where their rule is the law. These two power centres in their struggle and keeping their empires intact, continue these killings and bloodshed. How many economic and social reforms you may bring these two power centres fight against one another until one of the two is destroyed. It is a game of power politics,” said Ajay Kumar.

“If the land reforms are correctly implemented and the social suppression by the landlords and higher castes is eliminated and equal opportunities are provided to each and everybody, don’t you think this problem can be solved?”

“That sort of utopian government is only possible in writers’ imagination and books. Unless one of these two power centres is completely smashed away and eliminated this struggle for power will never end. Moreover, that chance is not seen in the nearest future. So this struggle continues. People have become insensitive towards this situation and are keeping them at a distance from the present war between the revolutionaries and the government. Everybody is now leading their lives by using the present society to their personal needs and to support their families. The present generation is more self-centred. Morality, justice, social equality all are now mere words without sanctity,” said Ajay Kumar.

“You have studied the present society well. May be you are right,” said Purushotham.

The discussion went on for a long time.

The struggle became a fight unto death and escalated into a war.

The ruling government deployed full armed police forces into action. The rulers of the Jambu Island extended their complete support to the government of Trilinga Island. The new regiments equipped with the most sophisticated arms were sent to crack down on the revolutionaries. They surrounded the suspected villages of revolutionary hideouts and began killing the youth and the old alike who were suspected. Countless encounters took the lives of many people. Many were tortured and their houses were burnt to ashes. Police claimed that they had broken the backbone of the revolutionaries and buried the revolutionary movement deep into the ground.

But the buried revolutionaries sprouted like seeds from the earth. At every tree and at every creek they came to life. They invented many new devices to counteract the enemy's methods. New sophisticated weapons, and the explosives like landmines, gelatine sticks, R.D.X. were used. They played the cat and mouse game with the enemy.

A new phase had begun in the game of this war. This phase was marked by surrenders. Police claimed that many revolutionaries had surrendered to the police. They paraded them before the media. Those who surrendered explained their waning belief in the movement and the methods adopted by the revolutionaries. They said that many of the others also got disgusted with the movement and were ready to join the mainstream of the society. The Government also announced many schemes for the rehabilitation to the surrendered revolutionaries. The prize money that was announced on the heads of the revolutionaries was also offered to them in case of their surrender. Gradually there was an increase in the number of the surrendering revolutionaries. They became ex-revolutionaries and some of them began working as informers to the police.

As the number of revolutionaries surrendering to the government was swelling, the number of new recruits into the movement also had gone up. Many of the new recruits were below twenty five years of age who studied up to tenth standard or intermediate. Most of them belonged to a low socio-economic group. They had the aim of reforming the society. Instead of ending their lives in poverty and living with social inequalities they were prepared to die fighting for a cause.

Meanwhile the notification for the general elections was issued in the Trilinga Island. All political parties big and small, made their preparations to contest in the elections.

“Boycott the elections,” the revolutionaries pasted wall posters in all the villages.

“Neither vote nor contest. Those who violate this order will be punished severely,” warned the revolutionaries.

“How can they issue such a warning? Without the involvement of the people how does the democracy survive?” the newspapers responded in their editorials.

“Voting under pressure is as bad as forcing them not to vote,” said some other people.

“What is wrong in warning them? When money and alcohol are playing main role in wooing the voters how can anybody accept the elections as genuine? Such degraded elections are to be boycotted,” supported the sympathizers of revolutionaries.

Whatever may be the opinions of different people but the number of the contestants has increased considerably. From about ten to twenty people filed their nominations to each segment in the elections. Big parties had a tough and worst time in selecting the suitable candidates. The people who missed getting a ticket under big banners resigned from the party and contested as independents. Some joined the other parties and tried their luck. Caste, religion, money, relations, proximity to the big leaders all worked in determining the ticket allotment. Many anti-social

elements got tickets from all parties. Election campaign began in the highest profile.

All contestants were given the protection with official gunmen by the police department. So, accompanied by the gunmen the contestants began their campaign by cars, jeeps, auto rickshaws, motorcycles and tractors. The occasional incidents of attacks by revolutionaries did not deter them. Everybody was busy with his or her own plan of action. Money and liquor flowed like streams and rivers. Party workers had a field day every day. The contestants requested the voters for their votes in the name of caste, region and religion. Many promises were made. Amidst the calls for boycotting and vote for self governance, the voters were given their own choice.

Election poll surveys by the media this time predicted the defeat of the ruling party and the victory of the opposition party. Another newspaper announced that its survey pointed towards the ruling party again winning the polls but with minimum majority.

The sales of the magazine which predicted the defeat of the ruling Kurangeese party soared high. Radio, television, newspapers, walls, hilltops, and even cinema halls were replete with the frenzy environment of the elections. With the candidates staking their lives, the election scenario appeared like a war zone. Whether it is war or not the final goal of elections is victory, which gives power. Power is aphrodisiac. It brings everything.

As the date of the elections approached, the heat reached the maximum. The elections were marked by attacks and counter-attacks, arsons and fighting with weapons, broken bones, maiming and occasional deaths between the rival groups.

People viewed them as routine incidents. Their main concentration was on the candidates who would be the MLAs, and which party would gain power and who would help them in future.

The ruling party blamed the opposition party that it had joined its hands with the revolutionaries and resorting to violence. Opposition party countered it. "If the ruling party comes into power, it will sell the country to the World Bank," said the opposition. The ruling party replied, "If the opposition party comes into power regional and religious powers will escalate." For the common people it all looked like a great drama. To win the elections all the methods that are not allowed by the law are adopted by the candidates and parties but no one dared to question them.

This time also Sukhender Reddy was contested as a candidate from the ruling party.

From the adjacent constituency Hakimpet his close friend Maruti Rao was contesting. Helping each other in all matters, both were very busy canvassing in their respective constituencies. Political observers are very much sure of their winning chances. Sukhender Reddy was given the best security by the police as there was already an attempt on his life. Wherever he went, there were the most stringent security arrangements around him.

One week before the date of elections Sukhender Reddy had planned to campaign in the villages that were infested with the revolutionaries. Therefore, his security arrangements were made tight with police vans full of C.R.P.F. personnel following him. A convoy of vehicles with his followers moved in tandem to every village where Sukhender Reddy has metd some of the important leaders of that area. All these villages were inspected by the police and intelligence in advance. Sukhender Reddy made small speeches in those places about the achievements of his party and he warned the voters not to fall into the trap of opposition parties. He said only his party which is a national party can maintain the stability of the nation. His followers praised him for his service to the people in their speeches, and as he was going to become the minister this time, all the villages in this constituency would have scope for development.

On that particular day of his campaign, he toured seven to eight villages and by that time it was already 9 'O' clock in the evening. His friend Kodandaram Reddy advised him to stop the campaign for that day. He was the right hand and devoted friend of Sukhender Reddy. He was the president of Repaka mandal and had considerable influence among people that always translated into votes. Sukhender Reddy gained a majority of about ten to fifteen thousand votes from that mandal division in every election and was the prime reason for his invincibility. This was the talk of the town.

"Let us call it a day. It is already late," Kodandaram Reddy again insisted.

"No! No! We have to go to Mulakalapally! And it is the last village on this road in our constituency. If not, we have to return tomorrow with much hardship, putting everybody on toes again," replied Sukhender Reddy.

"See! Everyone seems to be tired of today's long and tedious campaign. We will go to Mulakalapally village tomorrow and continue our campaign afresh," pleaded Kodandaram Reddy.

"Why are you in such a hurry today? Yesterday we campaigned till midnight. "9 o'clock is not a late night," persisted Sukhender Reddy.

"Friend, those villages are different. They are very friendly! But this village and the villages nearby them are known for the strongholds of the extremists. Jungle rules and night dwellers are prevailed here! Even staying up to this time is also a mistake on our part," Kodandaram Reddy tried to convince his friend.

"What shit they can do? This is the National Highway. And we have the strongest security ever imagined. Let us complete this program and you know that the people are also waiting there for our arrival. In another half an hour we will complete our today's schedule and take rest peacefully after that," argued Sukhender Reddy.

“OK, let us do it your way,” Kodandaram Reddy agreed finally.

So they continued their journey towards Mulakalapally. That was the forest area. Just five kilometers away from the destination, a black ribbon like road was shining bright in the glistening vehicle lights. A culvert looked benign. The escort Police van at front crossed it. Sukhender Reddy’s car had just passed it ... and by the time the police van following behind reached the culvert ...DHAM... DHAM... DHAM... a big explosion! The whole forest and the nearby earth was shaken with huge explosion. The ill-fated police van went sky high and burst into smithereens before hitting the ground. And the inmates of the van, ten CRPF men and the driver were torn into pieces of flesh and the remains of their bodies scattered all over the place. A ghastly sight! A big dark hollow was made on the road and electric wires zigzagged lead into the nearby thickets giving an impression that it was surely the handi work of some desperados.

Realizing the situation the trained CRPF men in the first van stopped their vehicle, took position, and started firing at the trees on both sides of the road. Some return firing also came from the forest. In a moment the whole peaceful area turned into a war zone. After some time the firing from the dark forest was ceased and the CRPF men too stopped the firing.

The driver of Sukhender Reddy immediately took U turn of his vehicle and drove it speedily towards Mallampally and the others followed him safe and sound. This time also Sukhender Reddy was lucky. But ten out of twenty CRPF men laid their lives for him on that fateful day. By the time the first rays of the morning sun touched the sky, policeman, journalists, politicians, ministers, NGOs, bomb disposal squads and lots of curious people reached the place of explosion.

The whole place looked like a deserted slaughter house with pieces of human flesh mixed with burnt oil and grease. The nauseous scent, the blood and the bones, oozing fluids, severed

heads, broken jaw pieces, crumpled limbs, brains and liver traces, bowels scattered all over, impossible to say which part belonged to which body. They all resembled a painting by the surrealist painter Salvador Dali.

Who are these CRPF personnel? Where are they from? What misfortune brought them here to lose their lives in this manner. It was beyond any body's imagination. For a fistful of rupees, a monthly pittance they laid their lives while providing security to the political leaders.

The next day all the news dailies screamed —“Land mines claim ten CRPF lives; Sukhender Reddy saved; Bloodshed in Trilinga Island; Election scene shines blood red” written in bold letters of dark red, the supplement photos, the telecast of the terrifying scenes on the television created panic and terror in the minds of readers and viewers.

“They are mad. Just to prove that they are still a force to reckon, which they are not, they resorted to this ghastly act; it is impossible even to imagine that in a civilized society such kind of violence takes place. This must be condemned by one and all,” spoke the Chief Minister of Trilinga Island.

“Nobody supports the killing of innocent jawans who work for their monthly salaries, but one has to understand this in the context of the retaliation by the revolutionaries against the false encounters” the members of Civil Liberties argued.

“They did a great mistake by killing innocent police men on duty. Blasting landmines under cover is an act of cowardice. For this ghastly act the so called revolutionaries have to pay heavy penalty. They killed our men but not our moral strength. We will crush them when time comes,” warned the Police people in heavy tones.

“A small technical mistake... just pressing the button a few seconds this way... gave a life time chance to Sukhender Reddy to escape from the ambush. There won't be a next time for

him. We will kill him for sure even if he takes shelter in the underworld. This is the last warning for him, his relatives and friends too who are hand in glove with Sukhender Reddy” revolutionaries gave their statement.

“He is lucky and his guardian angel is working over time. He escaped unscathed second time also Who knows? How many more have to still die to save him?” moaned Mukunda Rao, a teacher of Mulakalapally primary school.

“Why should people like him contest in elections and others pay penalty for their sake? What a great loss of money, security and lives? Why can’t they keep quiet and maintain low profile themselves when they are aware of the possibility of these things that happen at odd times?” His colleague Prabhakar argued.

“What loss does it matter to him? Fools and unfortunate ones like Seshiah and some people like CRPF jawans die like dogs but these hi-fi ones escape. Then Seshiah and his two grown-up sons, now, these innocent CRPF men for which purpose they all died? Even to recognize those blood bathed bodies by their kith and kin was an impossible task. Who knows how many bombs were placed under the culvert and how many people have to die before their targetted person gets killed?” Mukunda Rao expressed his sentiments.

“Do you think it is their intention to kill innocent people? They are for the downtrodden and the weak. They admitted their mistake and apologized for that faux pas. Few seconds of delay in blasting the car caused this havoc,” Prabhakar replied in his usual manner.

“If Sukhender Reddy opts out of campaign, it would be better for everybody from the point of their safety,” Mukunda Rao argued. “In truth, Sukhender Reddy is not that bad. He never exploited the backward or the poor. He might have hypertension. He expresses whatever comes to his mind and becomes vociferous about it. His character is intact even in this cesspool of politics.

He never accepts bribes. Such a straight forward fellow he is. He expresses his opinion very loud and clear and this made him unpopular among the revolutionaries. Good people like him must avoid politics.”

“Who cares these silly things? Politics is power and aphrodisiac. Who will be ready to forego power?” said Prabhakar.

“All these stunts and gimmicks are to grab the power... spending millions of rupees... day in day out campaigning... slogans and long speeches... begging for votes... and on the other side the so called revolutionaries too want power... through the barrel of a gun but not a ballot.” Mukunda Rao explained his version.

That discussion continued till late in the night.

But the campaign continued. None cared for the loss of lives or resources. Election process continued. People voted on the D-day. Election commission announced that barring a few incidents of firing into the air to disperse unruly mobs, everything was peaceful and smooth. But, the unofficial reports revealed the clandestine flow of money and liquor to woo the voters in large scale.

Police stated that there was more than 60% turn out of the voters in the naxalite infested areas and that indicated that the call to people to abstain from voting given by naxalites failed miserably. Some newspapers mentioned that the voter turnout was in fact nil, but the police and presiding officers voted for the ruling party candidate by illegal means.

Polling officers enumerated the incidents of extremists kidnapping the polling officers on duty, destruction of polling booths and invalidating the votes by pouring ink into the ballot boxes, and throwing the ballot boxes into deep wells... and so many. In those affected areas they ordered repolling. Some unconfirmed news of clash between two major political parties claiming few lives also made rounds.

Three days after the polling, the results proved the poll pundits' prediction of ruling party's debacle. But that defeat is so vast, in the hands of a new born party of regional status, Kurangeese party- a national party not only lost the elections but also lost even the status of the opposition party. The predictions of the trusted astrologists, the yajnas and the sacred offerings to the reputed gods all went off the mark.

The C.M. could not digest the defeat of his party. He said, "The regional party resorted to all sorts of illegal practices to woo the voters. They distributed money and liquor to the voters to ensure their victory" At another place and time he changed his words. "I accept the people's verdict. In democracy people are the real kings. Our party will act as a responsible opposition in the assembly."

Some journalist interrupted, "But sir! You have lost even that position..."

"Of course! See, this political system is totally corrupt. People like me are no more to remain in politics. I may say good bye soon and become a political recluse."

These ideas and statements of the Chief Minister gave the impression that the old man was going bonkers.

People have their own analysis about the results of elections. "the anti incumbency factor, you know, is really powerful. People never allow a party to come into power in succession anymore"

"Kilogram of rice for just 2 rupees; total prohibition;... these attractive promises really tilted the scales in favour of the regional party."

"This is primarily anti- vote. People got vexed with the hollow promises of the leader of the ruling party. So they gave the opposition a chance to rule. It is the hatred and dislike towards the ruling party turned into anger and that made the change."

“See! Voters have become wiser. They don’t allow the parties to win the elections second time. That makes the leaders to work hard for the welfare of the people.”

“That’s the beauty of Democracy! May be there are some black holes here and there. But the fabric of democracy covers one and all. Only in democracy it is possible to dethrone a powerful leader to be replaced by another, without any bloodshed. But the elections reflected the opinion of the majority, the public mood and the fairness of election process. At the moment Democracy is the only solution and it is for the society’s welfare and betterment. The revolutionaries must realize it and join the mainstream of the society” The editorials of many news dailies also reflected this idea.

“All this election process is false. These gimmicks never bring welfare to the downtrodden. As usual, the money plays major role in deciding the election. The rich and the famous take the reins and ride over the poor. Power comes to the poor only through the barrel of a gun. Then only they can solve their problems. Till then we continue to boycott these false elections,” the revolutionaries gave their statement.

The new Chief Minister is not a novice. He also ruled the Trilinga Island for some time in the past. He was famous for his populist programs. He lost his last previous election. But this time he created a new record in the history of the electoral politics by coming to power with a thumping majority.

In the press meet, the new C.M. explained his stance about the extremists, “I do not consider the problem in the perspective of the past government. I understand that as a social and economic issue and not as a law and order problem. I understand that it is the deep rooted struggle between the haves and the have-nots. It is a struggle by workers and farmers against the injustice meted out to them all these days. For me these revolutionaries are like brothers. I invite them for open discussions whole heartedly. I call them for the united struggle against all the problems of the

land, the hunger, the untouchability and so on. I try to reason them that there is no place for violence in Democracy. I will not allow these false encounters. I shall provide assistance for the welfare of the revolutionaries who surrender themselves to the Government. Dear brothers! Come with me! A new world is welcoming us.” ...Hearing his oration the journalists raised their eyebrows..

Even in that worst debacle, Maruti Rao of Kurangeese party won his election with good majority. But Sukhender Reddy retained his seat by a majority of just five hundred votes. Though the revolutionaries did their best to defeat him, the rebel candidate of his opponent did split some ten thousand votes that paved the way to his victory. All this news jolted Sukhender Reddy and he went into depression.

“Those who called for the boycott of elections tried their level best to defeat me. They influenced the people to cast their votes for my opponent. They maimed my party workers, burnt my election campaign jeeps, banners and posters. Even they tried to kill me but their attempt on my life took the lives of ten innocent CRPF men. Why have they got so much grudge against me, I do not understand!” Sukhender Reddy tried to reason with the media.

“In your neighbourhood constituency Maruti Rao had the similar problems but he won the elections with huge majority. The people say that he strived hard and developed his constituency in a great way. In comparison there is not much effort on your part and the same may be the reason for your low majority is the opinion expressed by some of your voters. What is your reaction?” the journalists tried to probe him.

“I condemn this irresponsible and baseless allegations against my performance. I did more than what Maruti Rao had done in his constituency. The Statistics speak for themselves. But the resistance I faced from the revolutionaries was enormous. The Protected water schemes, bank loans to the weaker sections, roads... what not! As there was restriction over my movement at

everywhere in the constituency I could not get the publicity that I really deserve” he argued his case.

“After this historical debacle... you have even lost the status of the main opposition party... what will be your future? Is this the beginning of the end to your party!” asked one journalist.

“You want me to predict my party’s future. Everybody knows how your newspaper tried to malign our party image and gave boost to the regional party. Let us see how long this party, which has come to power on impractical promises and populist programs, will survive? I am sure by the next elections it ceases to exist. And you compare a national party with a hundred years of history to a petty regional party! Its ridiculous, isn’t it? But, we respect people’s verdict and work as a responsible opposition party in the assembly,” he replied.

As the giant of a party which ruled the Trilinga Island for forty years failed to win atleast twenty seats made even the seasoned analysts wonder about it. As a ruling party it had used all the legal and illegal methods to secure enough votes to win but something went wrong somewhere. The leaders were baffled by the people’s verdict.

Political analysts, intellectuals, foreign media hailed the system of democracy. They said that the blood less coup, the transfer of power, and the transparent system would be possible because of the strong democratic system that prevailed in this country.

The new government introduced radical changes. Implementation of the welfare programmes like ‘prohibition,’ ‘for two rupees one kilogram rice for below poverty line people,’ ‘abolition of age old village Munsif system’ brought joy to many families. These reforms were welcomed wholeheartedly and celebrated by the people everywhere.

The new Chief Ministers appealed to one and all to put an end to the conflict and suggested that the revolution could

also be brought by democratic means also. So the so called “encounters” were no more seen and heard. The elimination of bourgeoisie took back seat. So people started believing in the restoration of peace in Trilinga Island.

Government gave permission to the revolutionaries to conduct their party meetings. People attended those meetings in large numbers. Humanity donned the shape of a great ocean. The individual lost his identity but became multiplied into thousands and thousands. May be the Mother Earth had delivered this multitude. Onlookers thought that the revolution was round the corner. If they contest in the elections, the observers thought, they would win out right. ‘No bullet, only ballot’... some enthusiasts wrote articles in newspapers. But the revolutionaries made their views plain and simple.

“If we take so called parliamentary path, then there will be an end to our existence. So its better we forget about it and continue our armed resistance,” one revolutionary poet roared. Bards, poets and supporters engaged the public with their powerful messages.

The new ruling party gave much priority to youth. The backward classes and the downtrodden were given important positions in the party and the government. A twenty five year old becoming a minister created a new trend, hitherto unknown in the traditions of the old ruling party, where the minimum age limit was around sixty to become a minister. All these reforms gave an impetus to the new party and it made inroads to the sections of backward and minority people, leaving the national party far behind.

Now it was rumoured that the revolutionaries were becoming a strong force with millions of rupees collected from the liquor contractors, doctors, big businessmen which was spent on purchasing arms and ammunition. The intelligence wing worked on this time and again in providing this information to the Chief Minister. Police got information about the infiltration

of revolutionaries into the various organizations and taking over them and about the front organizations that have the legal attire and protection.

Revolutionaries started involving themselves in many issues related to the public life. Many villages and towns were dictated by the parallel governments of revolutionaries. They fixed and controlled the price of essential commodities, doctors' fees, tuition fees, tailors' remuneration and the daily wages of labourers. They put strictures on graft and malpractices and warned the transgressors with dire consequences if anybody violated them.

The revolutionaries tried to implement some of the social reforms in their own style. Violence on women, divorce problems – they tackled many of such issues in amicable ways. Especially the issues that were prolonged for many years in the panchayats and courts were settled on the spot. It saved lots of money and time to the poor and the middle men's role was eliminated by it. They saw to it that the decisions were implemented effectively. It created furore among the anti social elements, criminals and street gangs. They controlled the corruption in government offices, and the brutal treatment of workers by landlords. Many of them left their own villages for the safer places in towns and the capital city. The government for a while kept Nelson's eye on these developments.

One year of the new government rule went off peacefully. "But this peace is like silence before the storm," warned one political analyst. As though to prove it, one day early morning, a top leader of the revolutionaries was killed in encounter with police. The media and television channels telecast the incident in various angles. The mist of peace that prevailed over a year was at once dissolved into turbulent hours.

The militant was an important member of the central polit buro of the revolutionaries. He had the price of one million rupees over his head. Such a person with tight security dying in the hands of police raised many a eye brow. They suspected some foul play in it. One of the 'false encounters' this must be...

“Today in the early hours, in the encounter between police and armed militants the central committee member of the revolutionary party was killed. The combating party in the Kondapur forest came in face to face with the militants and in spite of the police warnings the militants fired from a nearby hut. So police too in their self defence fired a few rounds and later identified the body of Gundebayina Raji Reddy alias Vikram. The other three escaped leaving behind their dead colleague, one AK47 rifle, lot of ammunition, four kit bags and some revolutionary literature.” Superintendent of Police of the district, Mr. Pradeep kumar gave this statement. Local people expressed their own doubts. One journalist described it as a fake encounter.

“This is surely a false encounter! They arrested him in a hotel in the neighbourhood of Karakata Island and killed him in the Kondapur forest and pictured the whole episode as a real encounter. The people’s representatives, police and the government has to pay heavy penalty for this cruel act. The Chief Minister who was very much vociferous in condemning the fake encounters in the pre poll scenario during elections is now using the same methods in suppressing the revolutionaries. It is proved once again that all these so called leaders finally protect the rich, leaving the poor in lurch. So we request the people to teach a lesson to this government also and be prepared for the ensuing war,” the revolutionaries declared.

They gave Raji Reddy a great farewell in his village. People from all villages came to see him for the last time. They praised his character and the sacrifices he made for the welfare of the poor and the downtrodden. Though born into a rich family, they said that Raji Reddy believed in mass struggle for the upliftment of the poor. Some poets compared him with Che Guevara and Charu Majumdar.

People of that Trilinga Island were gripped with panic as they thought that there would be a kind of retaliations by the revolutionaries any time. As they expected there was an appeal from the militants to observe “the bandh” for two days as a protest

against the false encounter. For those two days everything came to stand still in that Trilinga Island. Business outlets, shops, petrol bunks, banks, hotels, schools, colleges, and cinema theatres were closed. Police warned the owners not to close their outlets and assured them of full protection. But none cared to listen to them.

Government wanted to prove its authority and efficiency. Under police protection the Road Transport Corporation tried to run buses as usual. But nobody dared to travel in them. Some night halt buses were burnt. Telephone exchanges, Mandal Revenue Offices and railway stations at random were burnt down. Three hundred million rupees worth of public property was burnt to ashes in the arson and violence.

“The burning and destruction of public property, unwarranted violence, and unnecessary bloodshed leads the Trilinga Island back to the phase of the under development again. The government’s efforts to eradicate poverty with the help of all the development programs shall come to standstill with the violent and rash actions of the prodigal brothers.” Saying this the Chief Minister again offered unconditional invitation to all the revolutionaries and appealed to them to join the mainstream for the upliftment of the poor and the downtrodden. Once again, he emphasized on the futility of the role of violence in a democracy.

As tears rolled down his eyes, he said with a choking voice, “I am ready to lay down my life, if that is necessary, in developing the Trilinga Island into paradise.” Some people believed it and they too were burst into tears.

“Violence begets violence. Chief Minister, who had promised the people that there would be no false encounters thereafter, failed to keep up his word. This violence is the offspring of that deceit. This double tongued government’s words nobody will believe. These crocodile tears serve no purpose.” People’s Rights groups opined.

“Revolutionaries! Please shun violence!” newspapers appealed to them through their editorials.

12

At 8 A.M. in the early morning Balu Naik, the Circle Inspector of Police, came out hearing the sound of the calling bell. It was Tirumal Rao an old friend of him and a lawyer who was waiting outside and. "Hi! Tirumal! How come this appearance of yours so early this morning? What's the matter?" Balu asked while greeting him.

"The link between lawyers and police never breaks, don't you know that?" so saying, he settled in a sofa in the drawing room. Both were class mates. His family helped Balu Naik to come up in his education. Their friendship began during high school days and became stronger day by day. Balu joined the police force and Tirumal Rao settled as a practicing advocate and was also a member of people's rights organization. As a member of people's rights group Tirumala had to give statements against Police now and then, but it did not affect their friendship. Frequent meetings, dinner parties, family friendships were always there and they enjoyed without problems.

Kavita the seven year old daughter of Balu Naik served them tea.

"Good morning Kavita!"

"Good morning uncle... how is aunty?"

"Fine, are you not going to School?"

"About to go! Mother asked me to serve you tea, so I am."

"Thank you, dear!"

"You are welcome uncle" that little girl went inside. Tirumal Rao appreciated the girl for her cherub behavior. "She will be a doctor," he said.

"How can we say my dear friend? Farfetched idea, isn't it?" Balu Naik said.

“Coming to the point, today my case comes for hearing and I wish to remind you...”

“Which one?”

“Swantana chit fund ...”

“That case! Who fled with one million rupees...! Why do you accept to argue such cases?”

“To inform you that he is here to surrender himself to the court” – Tirumala Rao explained.

“Then it is better for your client... one more thing... your organizations are giving statements in full stream! Everything is fake encounter!” Balu Naik said.

“You tell me! Such a big leader comes here and takes shelter in this jungle. You got wind of it. There was no resistance from them and you killed him in self defense. You want us to believe this concoction!”

“We know that your top leaders have the ultimate security more than our CM has. Tell me who are dying in this war? All of them belong to either the backward class or the dalits... and all your top leaders belong to high caste. You talk a lot about this class struggle but in your organization all the front line soldiers who succumb to the line of fire are always of the lower class,” said Balu Naik.

“This is a wrong allegation and not fair against the party which always fights against caste, creed and class differences.”

“That is unfair? This caste culture sank into the blood of the higher castes. They always try to down play the lower rung of the society.”

“What about that encounter? Do you still say that it is not a fake one? Tell as a human being?”

“Off the record! Can I tell you something?”

“Yes, Go on!”

“The bodyguard of Raji Reddy, the most trusted one for the last twenty years spilled the beans and gave the address of his shelter in Karataka Island. The police were glad to have such a big fish with ‘Z’ security. So they arrested him in his den and brought here into the Kondapur forest and finished him. You have to blame your own people for all this but not the police.”

“How much money did you pay to that traitor?”

“It depends upon the demand, you know! And this fellow Raji Reddy killed so many of our colleagues.”

“This is brutal. You bribe our people to gain information and thereupon take revenge. This is quite unfair!”

“Everything is fair in love and war! Bhima broke the thighs of Duryodhana. Was that fair? Lord Krishna himself suggested that. Were they fair enough in Killing Abhimanyu? Dear friend! This is war. It will never end. Burns infinitely like the body of Ravana, the demon on pyre,” said Naik.

“Don’t quote epics and puranas. I don’t know whether you have that much knowledge about epics and mythology. But you have to accept that the tactics you are using against the revolutionaries are brutal and barbaric. If you fail to see it as socio-economic problem then you will find no solution for this. If you think it will be suppressed by cruel measures it is nothing but a mere delusion.”

“Yes, it started as a socio-economic problem but grew into militarization threatening the national security. Instead of fighting for the people they have established contacts with the terrorists of Assam, Nagaland, Kashmir and LTTE. So now it is a total war. They have procured the highly sophisticated and the most modern weapons. How can any government tolerate this attitude? They are the threat to the national security. Any government worth its salt likes to crush these anti social elements in the bud itself. Talking about cruelty, your methods, do you think they are less

cruel? We are not using land mines to kill the people. We are not branding people as informers and severing their limbs or lives. We never behead the people and place their heads in the hands of their wives. We never burn the buses and trains with passengers inside. You think these drastic things are not cruel but our encounters are cruel. You want us to keep quiet while they establish their own style of government by routing out this democratically elected government. Let that also happen. We shall see how these human rights are implemented by them in their society? Do you think they allow people to express their opinions freely when they come to power?

“You had better understand this struggle, Balu! This armed struggle is at its primary stage in this country. So certain mistakes are inevitable. But these are all our children. They are fighting for the cause of the oppressed people. They know well that they are fighting with a big nation with unlimited resources. But this fighting keeps in check the atrocities and repressive measures of the state and the rich on the have-nots to some extent. So you must be a little sympathetic towards the revolutionaries who fight for the cause of the society. Arrest them and hand them over to the court and implement the judgment instead of killing them in the name of encounters. You are the protectors of law and order and if you break it then what will be the use of our constitution and human rights?” Tirumala Rao argued his case.

“In fact, our Chief Minister was very much liberal towards the revolutionaries. But, you see! Your party people used that lenience to strengthen their force. Collected millions of rupees, purchased latest weapons, brain washed the poor and the unemployed, raised hopes among the backward communities. Naturally their ideology has the power to attract youth. They infiltrated into the organizations and gradually became a threat to the total political system. Observing this at close quarters no government will keep quiet. If you really wish to mend this society, then you come into open, contest the elections, and prove your mettle. Win the elections and do the justice in your own way. But

killing opponents in the name of class war doesn't serve this purpose. It leads to anarchy. Which developed society in the world accepts this brutality? Armed struggle was very much needed about fifty years ago. Now that concept is no more tenable." Stressed Balu Naik.

"But what about the dominance of the rich and the higher communities in society! Elections... we all know that is a big farce. Whoever has money and muscle power he only dictates the results. Show me a single person who won the elections without resorting to these unholy means."

To fight against this sort of farce ... a dedicated force must be born among the people. Some struggle, armed or unarmed! And remember even people like you who have come from the downtrodden layers of society are in such important positions is the result of such struggles. Otherwise they still might be leading the lives of slavery at the feet of the landlords pleading them as "your slave, I am! I lick your feet!" countered Tirumala Rao.

"This is the greatest lie. People like us are in this position not because of your armed struggle. To develop into high league, first they have to receive good education, earn a job and livelihood, shed the ignorance. All this is possible because of the implementation of the constitutional provisions envisioned by Dr. Ambedkar. Take my own example!... I am placed in police force now. How! Government provided me the hostel facilities and got me educated. Because of reservations I got a seat in the college, later a job. Like me many students from weaker sections got education and employment and settled in their lives. Now landlords respect me. Those who stayed away from our tribal community are also cherishing our presence and friendship. As we are in responsible jobs we are honored now. Why! Because of the nobility of the constitution that we have in our country. Because of the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution! But I know it well that this kind of respect and regard given to me by the rich landlords and others is just because of my position, the job I am holding, the gun I carry. The same is with

the extremists, they are respected and feared as long as they have guns in their hands. The revolution brought about by armed struggle will not last long. Any change that comes because of fear is short lived. Such change in society remains as long as the fear exists in the minds of people. It will not last longer.”

“You mean to say that armed struggle has not achieved anything?

“I did not say that. It has increased the self confidence of the downtrodden people. They have started believing in their own strength. Daily wages have been increased. The intensity of their oppression is on the wane. Landlords, local gangs have come down. Some of them shifted their dens to cities. Feudalism is totally broken in the agricultural sector. Now there is almost no big landlord. But the price we have paid to achieve this is many more times higher than required. How many have lost their lives, how much blood has been shed? How much public property has been destroyed... unimaginable! Is there no alternative to an armed struggle?” Balu questioned.

“Which alternative? The same experiment has been taking place for the last fifty years. With what result! The Rich became richer and the poor poorer. Bribe and graft everywhere. The politics of religion and caste took the front seat. In the name of liberalization we mortgaged our country to the foreign capitalists. We feel proud of our heritage... We have already sold this country to World Bank and International Monetary Fund. What is left in our store is nothing but dark and bleak future. Conditions are deteriorating... day by day.” Tirumala Rao said.

“May be it is true! But, do you think that your armed struggle can put an end to the globalization and the supervision by the World Bank. You just remember what these protagonists of revolutionaries preached us during our college days... they hoped to hoist the red flag over the Red Fort. “We do not need any chairman... the Chinese chairman is our chairman they

proclaimed... Now you tell me how near they have come to the Red Fort,” said Balu Naik

“I have already told you. There will be some pitfalls in the beginning in any movement. You have to understand them in that perspective.”

“How long do you think you will be in this preliminary stage? It started in 1946 and reached its zenith in 1967. Its already More than 40 years... still not grown up! What is that you have learnt during these 40 years? Your theorists say that without people’s involvement or participation no movement goes further... now you show me where is this movement? Do you think with the involvement of just three or four desperados the whole populace will move ahead? When you gave a call for the boycott of elections, tell me, how many people responded to that? Doesn’t it prove that people and you are placed in different paths?”

“Oh God! I did not notice the time. We shall continue this discussion later. Anyhow be careful. You are in the Police force.”

“Why, your people are also targetting the downtrodden people like me?”

“Because you are my friend, I am telling you. They consider every police man as their enemy number one. Though you come under weaker sections, police is police in their view. So be careful” Tirumal Rao bade good bye to his friend and left for the court.

Balu Naik came inside, completed his morning chores, and was about to go.

“Breakfast is ready,” announced his wife Sujatha.

“I am already late. I shall have it in my office. Has our baby gone to school?”

“Our male-servant took care of that. Have your breakfast here and go. Nothing will happen if you are late for a moment,” his wife said.

“Already it is 9.30. I have to reach the station within five minutes.” Saying this he came out and started his motor cycle. Police station is within 200 yards of his house. As he was crossing a few blocks from his house, two young men of uncertain age fired on him at point blank range. Yadagiri, a constable on the lookout, tried his best to chase them but they escaped.

The neighbors swarmed around him seeing what happened! Sujatha heard that noise, came out and saw that ghastly scene and fainted. They took Balu Naik to the nearby hospital. The doctors declared that he was already dead.

“All these days we thought that these revolutionaries do not harm the weaker sections. Now that distinction is also gone,” said one onlooker.

“What if he belongs to weaker sections? Police is class enemy for them” – said another one

“He became a police man only to earn his livelihood? And this is man’s record clean. Always he helped the poor. I don’t understand why they have killed him” said the just one.

“He had that police uniform, on him that reason is enough for these revolutionaries. But these police men ... are they clean? How many innocent lives they have claimed?”

“They killed some. These people kill some more. But see who is dying after all! The innocent people from weaker sections on both sides. Now how much misery Balu Naik’s wife and his children have to face hereafter?”

“Government gives an ex-gratia of at least five lakh rupees to Balu Naik’s wife. If she is educated, she will be given a job on compassionate grounds.”

“Whatever may be the compensation, it cannot bring back the deceased one. The memory of his death haunts throughout her life?”

Like this People of that area discussed many things about that incident. The Advocate Tirumala Rao saw his friend’s dead body and cried uncontrollably.

After two days, the revolutionaries gave a statement- “We killed Balu Naik as a protest against the fake encounter in the Kondapur forest.”

Balu Naik’s last rites were performed with state honours. Government announced Five lakh rupees as ex-gratia, and a junior assistant post for his wife after completing Intermediate course and educational expenses of their child.

Leaders of various parties gave statements based on their views in lieu of the expectations of people.

The hopes of people had on the new government about the maintain law and order melted away like mist after the sunrise. People who were hopeful of the end of fake encounters and elimination of class enemies became disillusioned and disappointed. Situation in the Trilinga Island came back to square one.

13

Patarlapadu is one of the biggest villages in Hakimpet constituency. The cultural department of Government staged a dram in that village. The story of the drama goes like this.

A few young men unable to accept the atrocities of their village landlords enter the forest and join the Revolutionaries. There they are taught about the people’s resistance and the armed struggle as the only way to bring about the total revolution. They are given training in rifle shooting. Obeying the orders of their commanders these new recruits enter the villages and kill the persons who are branded as the class enemies. They are chased

by the armed police. Then starts a series of killings and counter killings. Loss of innocent lives, burning of buses, Railway stations, Telephone exchanges, land mine blasts. Seeing this unvolated blood of her children, the motherland weeps with uncontrollable grief. She pleads all to shun the violence, explaining her children that there are many ways to reform the society, in peaceful and democratic means.

“The players acted well. The dialogue delivery, the stage decoration, their makeup, music and the songs composed in folklore style attracted one and all. It was a grand success.

Government started new ways of attracting youth. By just imitating the ways of revolutionaries. the brains in the government thought they can achieve peace by staging this drama at all the Naxal inferted villages.

They selected the path of propaganda. “Revolution is the only way to achieve the socialistic society. Violence is a must to achieve revolution” like the slogans of militants are countered by “violence begets violence. Except loss of innocent lives, nothing can be achieved by violence.” So they hired poets, singers and actors, produced powerful plays like this, and started showing them in many villages.

People who watched the play were moved. Tears rolled down their cheeks. They identified the incidents and lead roles with the events of their real life. The Police strategy was worked out well for a while. But the impact did not sustain. People who cry under the influence of hit tragedies like Devdas, forget the essence of the story and go mad if their own son or daughter falls in love with a person belonging to a lower strata.

Government announced many schemes to woo the youth away from the influence of Revolutionaries. Who surrendered themselves to the government were given financial assistance to start a new life, the price on their heads will be given to them only, like so on and so forth. The propaganda reached sky high. Thus started... the chapter of surrenders.

Having achieved some limited success in defeating the revolutionaries militarily, the government is now offering with attractive monetary rewards to those who wish to surrender with arms. The news of the mass surrenders of revolutionaries and the lakhs of rupees that changed hands are the prime news in the newspapers. Persons with serious allegations like scorching of buses, killing of landlords, and eliminating police officers, and militants with two or three lakh rupees price on their heads made their appearances before media like the celebrities, escorted by police. Some of the important militants considered to be the back bones of the party and the strategists also came forward to surrender to the police. Many of the sympathizers and supporters of the revolutionary party were astonished by such development. One such case is the surrender of Bhanumurthy.

Bhanumurthy's father belongs to an affluent family. He was an electrical contractor who earned millions in his business and his dream was that his only son should become a doctor. His friendship with Vikram who gave him books with revolutionary content totally changed his perspective of society and human miseries. He felt that those books guided him into the light from darkness of ignorance that surrounded him so far.

He understood that property owned by rich people is an organized robbery. And his father was in the same league. He came to the conclusion that the only way to end this robbery was the armed struggle.

After completing intermediate course he joined a medical college. He is intelligent and studious. He stayed in the hospital in Wangala town and thus he had acquaintance with the gem like students with volcanic instincts. Revolutionary songs and speeches were the order of the day. Bhanumurthy became the leader of this volatile group.

Bhanumurthy spent his time seriously studying and analyzing the patterns of revolution in Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Bolivia and other Latin American and African countries.

He understood the teachings of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, Che gu Vera, Ho chi min, Charu Majumdar, and Kanu Sanyal. He became the symbol of revolution among his friends. He started planning a suitable strategy of revolution for Trilinga Island.

Bhanumurthy is known for his highly emotional speeches. His speeches are filled with fire and brim stone. For him speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. And he used it so effectively that the listeners go frenzy after his speech and get ready for action.

Very soon he developed friendly relations with many revolutionary organizations. He started writing articles, preparing pamphlets, hand bills, essays, theories and books suggesting the means and ways to liberate Trilinga Island from the clutches of the capitalists, bourgeois and oppressors. He participated in many secret meetings and discussed about the measures to be adopted to strengthen the revolution with the help of other leaders. He proposed a plan of action; if implemented, it can lead them to power and they can hoist the red flag over the Red Fort.

The Principal of Medical College sent his report on Bhaumurthy and his activities to his father Vasamurthy and the possible consequences. Vasamurthy met his son and requested him to give up his studies and help him in his business. Bhanumurthy reacted very firmly..."Dad! I am sorry to say, you are a big bourgeois yourself. You have robbed the society to build up your business empire. Elimination of insects like you is my first duty. Our ways and paths are different. They will never meet."

"So, what are you going to do?" his father asked.

"That is a difficult task. If you wish to hear, make your heart strong! I am going to create panic in the minds and hearts of the oppressors. The capitalist cars moving in the pastures of the sky shall descend to earth. Earthquakes will come and swallow the oppressors of the poor," said Bhanumurthy.

“Good! Hot blood makes young man like you vibrant and crazy. I send every month five thousand bucks and you make yourself cozy, read all those red books, gather some useless mob and cry out slogans in high pitch. And you defy me and the society. Go ahead! But remember, from this day onwards, you will not get a single paisa from me. Hunger makes you remember your parents,” Vasamurthy threatened his son with dire consequences, if he fails to leave the path of revolutionaries.

“That is your illusion, father! All you capitalists believe is that they can buy everything with money. Money is your world. You may think that if you stop sending money I will come to your terms. It is mere a delusion dad! A big delusion! I do not need your five thousand rupees. I don’t want this education. Good bye, my dad! ... good bye!! If I return victorious we shall meet again. Then I will give all your ill-earned money to the society. If I die in this struggle you have to feel happy that your son had died for a cause. Kindly explain this to my mother. Victory or death! Death is fit for warriors. That is my goal. Dad! Good bye!” He joined the revolutionary party and was in exile thereafter. Soon he was placed in an important position in the party. Government announced two lakh rupees as a price on his head.

Two years after this incident, the revolutionaries attempted a big raid on a police station. Police effectively thwarted it. Many revolutionaries who participated in that attack escaped except Bhanumurthy and three others.

The prize catch of Bhanumurthy created ripples in the Trilinga Island. The news hit the headlines of all the newspapers and the electronic media. T.V. channels telecaste his photos and life history in episodes. The intellectuals and sympathizers expressed their anxiety and doubts about the safety of Bhanumurthy. They gave statements of apprehension that police might kill him in a false encounter. So they demanded the police to produce Bhanumurthy before the magistrate immediately.

There was a heavy stampede in the court premises when the police produced him before the Magistrate. The representatives of the media and television channels gathered in hundreds, police had to resort to Lathi charge to them before he was taken into court chamber. Bhanumurthy looked fresh and cheerful, even in the midst of the chaotic situation.

In his white lalchi (kurtha) and *pajama* and with his well grown beard Bhanumurthy looked graceful, and appeared like the perfect symbol of revolution.

Magistrate gave orders to keep him in judicial custody for fifteen days.

Ten days passed. On eleventh day at night 10 'o' clock about ten revolutionaries armed with automatic weapons suddenly attacked the two unsuspecting MLAs of ruling party in their official quarters. They killed the gunmen and kidnapped the two legislators in the vehicles kept outside for them. The news spread like wild fire and by the time Police reached the spot everything was over.

The politicians pleaded the revolutionaries for the lives of the kidnapped MLAs. Members of Human Rights associations came forward to mediate. According to the conditions made by the revolutionaries government should release Bhanumurthy and his three colleagues. Revolutionaries announced the release of the legislators after Government. Agreed to release Bhanumurthy. The two legislators reached the city after two days.

Media and television people grilled them with questions. They told the media that they were blind folded and so they were not aware of the place where they were kept, but the revolutionaries treated them with respect, gave them food three times a day, and served them with coffee and tea. After their release they had to walk for about ten kilometres through the dense forest. Later they took a ride in a bamboo loaded lorry. Once they reached the city they took an auto to their houses.

“MLAs reached home safe and sound” the newspapers highlighted. But, in that excitement everybody forgot about the two gunmen who laid down their lives.

Six months after this incident government resorted to a large scale propaganda about the surrender of revolutionaries to the police in large numbers. C.M, Home Minister, media gave statements after statements in favour of surrender the revolutionaries. Police too gave importance to this idea. One after the other the revolutionaries started surrendering themselves to the police. Revolutionaries condemned the government’s policy and declared that the persons who were coming forward were not the real ones and it was the government’s false propaganda. Harping on a lie to make it appear as the truth was the strategy of this government. They advised people not to fall a prey to it and reassured them that a real revolutionary never surrenders to this wretched government.

But only after few days, the one who is praised by the poets as the symbol of revolution, for whose release the ten revolutionaries had resorted to kidnapping the MLAs braving their lives, the one who declared the hoisting of red flag over the Red Fort, that same Bhanumurthy surrendered to the police leaving the people of the Trilinga Island to astonishment and shock.

Police presented him before the press and the media with pride.

They questioned him about the logic of his surrender.

“Revolution is a dream. Equality, fraternity, international friendship ... all a distant dream! Unity without any boundary line in this Universe is another farfetched dream. Stateless society... classless society... all these dreams are fine to exist only in the world of dreams. Let them be dreams, otherwise man has to suffer... grief, tears, blood, violence... no... no... let them be our dreams... I cannot say anything more than this... leave me alone” he pleaded.

Thereafter he resumed his course in Medicine, became a doctor, started private practice and acquired good name, fame and money. He launched a special scheme to help the poor in a super specialty hospital. He questioned himself and answered. “Yes. This is also a way to help the poor and downtrodden... A way to serve the society in an individual capacity...” : this thought gave him happiness. His father was also happy at his progress after joining the mainstream of society.

14

The government had speeded up the policy of helping the surrendered revolutionaries. Many militants small and big surrendered themselves to the police. With the financial help and incentives offered to them, the surrendered revolutionaries had started their life from a fresh mode. Maisaiah was one such men.

Maisaiah belongs to weaker sections. He worked for a local landlord as a farm hand. One day he suffered from diahorrea and had to stay away from the work. But the landlord took this as an offence and illtreated him howling with abuses. Maisaiah's blood boiled. He decided to die as a revolutionary rather than living the life of servitude. He established contact with some revolutionaries from their village and went underground. After five six months of observation he became a squad member...

Maisaiah is not that much educated. He has no theoretical knowledge about revolution. But he participated actively in scorching buses, and blasting telephone exchanges. After some time he came to know that his aged parents fell sick and were about to die. His squad leader gave him permission to leave them.

His surrender was on low key. He was given ten thousand rupees to start a shoe shop. His incompetence to run business ruined him. He had to go back to his former life as a farm hand under another landlord. The analysts assessed that people like Maisaiah are in the forefront in numbers than the true revolutionaries. That number had increased day by day. The police

instead of being sympathetic to the surrendered militants started harassing them at some pretext or the other.

Six months after the surrender of Maisaiah the revolutionaries killed Yadagiri Reddy, a landlord of his village and his previous master. So, police suspected him and started interrogating him in their own style. They did not accept his version of innocence and they took him every day to the police station and tortured him by using the third degree methods. But Maisaiah stuck to his version of innocence and finally they let him off.

Now police resorted to new techniques. Whenever they went for raids on the revolutionary hide outs they kept the surrendered militants in the front line as shield and these unfortunate people became the victims of land mines and grenade attacks by the revolutionaries. Thus even in the drama of the surrender, the intellectuals and leaders surrender of revolutionaries had the red carpet welcome and for the weaker sections, and illiterates got entirely a different treatment.

The leaders of weaker sections noticed this difference. So far no movement is effective and transparent in providing equality to their cadres. The higher caste people are given preference over that of the weaker sections. In every revolutionary movement the people of weaker sections shed their blood, but the fruits reach the hands of others. To avoid this people who belong to the weaker sections should not be a part in the movements led by others. "We can lead our movements ourselves effectively. Even the Dalits in the revolutionary movement should believe only their cadre" roared a dalit leader. Dalit movement took its roots and gradually spread all over the Trilinga Island, condemning all the political parties for their callousness in helping the weaker sections.

The Newspapers analyzed that the rate of surrenders is more from the constituency of Hakimpet where sitting M.L.A. is Maruti Rao. Some suspected the hand of Maruti Rao in the

surrender of Bhanumurthy and Maisaiah. Revolutionaries also came to the conclusion that Maruti Rao's good name and works indirectly affected their cadre and progress. So they gave him a warning. "We know your comradeship with Sukhender Reddy. That is enough reason from us to eliminate you. All these days we have tolerated you because you have worked for the people. But now you are hand in glove with police and helping them to weaken the strength our cadre. This is viewed seriously and if you do not change your attitude "you have face the dire and terrible consequences."

"I have no role in the militants' surrender. My wish is to serve the people with that purpose, entered into politics. No power on the earth can distract me from that goal." Maruti Rao gave a statement which was highlighted by the media and newspapers.

Government agreed to provide him Z category security. But Which Maruti Rao declined saying that people will protect him and even if he loses his life in the service of people he doesn't care.

Hakimpet people predicted the doom. Many advised him to accept police protection. Some pleaded him to go out of this place for a while.

"Taking police protection, in my view, is moral death to me. All my life I helped the poor. Then why should I worry! You are my people. If you think I committed a mistake, I am ready for any punishment. I run away from this place... am not going to this is my native land... where I was born and brought up. if I die, I die here... in this soil. Four times I won from this constituency with highest majority... all because of your blessings. That is my protection. You are my guards and guardian angels." He said.

His friend Sukhender Reddy called on him and said in harsh words. "What do you think about yourself? They gave you death warning and you say -I don't care, I need no protection! Are you comparing yourself with Gandhiji! Even Mahatma Gandhi was killed by the miscreants. What is that you gain by dying in the

hands of few hot headed people? If you wish to achieve any thing you have to be alive to do so. Do you think dying in those hands is a great sacrifice? Do you think they will shower kindness on you because you have served your people well? Sympathy, kindness and compassion are the words not found in their dictionary. They know that we are childhood friends. The same hatred they have on me is there on you. Do not be a soft target for them. Accept police protection without any argument. You have to be alive atleast for the sake of your wife and children.” Sukhender Reddy warned him.

“You don’t worry! They will not do any harm to me!” assured Maruti Rao.

“Already you are in their hit list and they have confirmed it,” said Sukhender Reddy.

“If they kill me the loss is theirs. They get all the blame and bad name. They know that I have never committed any mistake and they also know well about our friendship. What is not palatable for them is people like me proving that democracy is the right means to help the poor and oppressed. This ideological difference is the reason for their antagonism against me. They also know and are well aware of the consequences of my death in their hands. To hit on my moral fibers they are giving this type of statements. But I will not quit politics. I will serve the people as long as I live.” replied Maruti Rao.

“I never advised you to quit politics. But please accept police protection. Am I not now under their protection? They will not spare your life. I do not understand your argument!”

“I do not like to go to the people with police security all around me. I cannot accompany with some innocent gunmen dying for my sake,” said Maruti Rao.

Sukhender Reddy has failed to convince Maruti Rao.

Maruti Rao's wife Sujatha also tried her best, pleaded, went on fast, threatened him with suicide, but Maruti Rao was firm in his decision.

He continued his efforts to help the people. Every village he toured and looked into the problems of the people. Because of his efforts many villages were provided with the protected water supply, permanent buildings for primary schools, roads to the distant villages, telephone facilities, primary health centers in Mandal head quarters, co-operative banks, loans to weaker sections, development programs for women ...His constituency was above all in such developmental activities. He became an example for the real representatives of people.

He helped each and everybody who approached him but he remained the same economically and morally.

One year passed.

Some analysts believed that the revolutionary movement is on the wane because of the surrenderer of important revolutionaries. Others considered it as a temporary phase and were of the opinion that a new cadre was being recruited to strengthen the movement. Poverty, oppression, crime, injustice as long as they are in the society there is no end for cadre and no death for the revolutionary movement. The police are propagating the wrong news to prove their efficiency. The political analysts wrote about their observations in the papers.

Some reasoned that the participation of intellectuals in the revolutionary movement is no more there and the fact is well supported by the exit of Bhanumurthy from the movement. Now the movement is totally in the hands of lumpen group.

Some were of the opinion that the so called intellectuals are like cats on the wall. They sit in the AC rooms and paint poverty. One need not worry about the presence or absence of that group. Only workers can propel the movement forward this is the statement of some other people.

One day early in the morning in an interior area of the Kotthakonda hillocks the police surrounded the revolutionaries and in the ensued firing twelve revolutionaries lost their lives. The news spread like wild fire.

Police said that after receiving definite information about the secret meeting of revolutionaries in the hillocks, police surrounded the place with full force. For about Twelve hours the firing continued from both sides. It was stopped, after the police understood that many of the revolutionaries fled from the place leaving their dead comrades on the spot. There were twelve bodies including three women all in the age group of 20 and 25. Police recovered two AK47 guns, one SLR, lot of ammunition, eight kit bags, one diary, and rations sufficient for three, four days and cooking utensils, party literature. Newspapers and the electronic media highlighted the news with photos and life histories of the deceased.

But the impact of this incident was not very deep. People read the news casually and felt that these things have become quite common.

Police said two of the twelve dead revolutionaries had a price of two lakh rupees on their heads and on others of about ten thousand.

“Revolutionaries who sacrifice themselves for the movement never die. Their sacrifices will not go unnoticed.” – said the sympathisers of the movement.

The last rites were attended by thousands of people in their respective villages of the dead revolutionaries.

“All this had happened because of a traitor who gave information to the police about the shelter in the Kotthakonda hillocks and police fired on the unprepared comrades and killed them. The police and the representatives of the people of that area in general and Maruti Rao in particular have to pay the price,” the revolutionaries warned. In protest against the

encounter they destroyed some more public property. They blasted the new Mandal office, scorched buses, damaged a telephone exchange and in some villages they set fire to the landlords' houses. The official estimate of the loss of property amounted to about 20-30 million rupees.

Another two months passed.

The people of Potharam village invited Maruti Rao for the inauguration of the newly constructed primary school building. As the village is adjacent to the forest area his well wishers advised him not to go. But the village people insisted on his presence for the inauguration of school building and assured that they would all form into a shield for him against any attempt on his life.

Maruti Rao accepted their invitation and went to that village. The program started at 10 a.m. and finished by 12 a.m. He delivered a very emotional speech.

“Primary education is highly neglected in this country. Government is spending crores of rupees on colleges and universities. The expenditure on primary schools is negligible. No black boards, no teachers, no benches. Rich and affordable people are sending their children to private city schools. The poor have to depend on the Government schools only. It is the government's responsibility to provide necessary facilities in the schools. I pressurized the government to sanction this permanent building to your village school. I am glad that the efforts we had put in for the last five or six years came to a successful end. I will try to sanction three more teacher posts to your school.”

“Maruti Rao zindabad”! Claps and slogans reached sky high.

“My close friends were against my coming over here. My wife had tears in her eyes. I assured them that I would be protected by the good wishes of the people. I told her people in this village are ready to give up their lives to protect me. Now I am happy to see you all here. Your love and affection are the main source and

secret of my success. I have come to the politics with the motive of doing service to the people. You have elected me four times in succession. I am sure I have fulfilled your most of your needs. Some more issues are there to attend in the future. I don't know how much lifespan God has granted me but as long as I live I promise you that I dedicate myself to the welfare of people," – Once more claps deafened the ears.

"MLA Maruti Rao zindabad! Our beloved MLA zindabad!" People around Maruti Rao shouted.

"We have adopted the path of Democracy for ourselves. There is no place for violence in a democracy. We can solve any problem with peaceful talks. We can achieve many things in a peaceful way. The government that fails to reach the people's expectations can be defeated in elections. That had happened in the previous elections. They defeated our party and voted the opposition party for power. So in democracy the change of power takes place by peaceful means. Nobody can say that one has permanent right to rule over the people. Every politician of today is aware of the people's reactions and the consequences if they are ignored. We too know that there are some lacunae in democracy. We have to overcome them and go ahead. Because if one has a headache it does not mean that the head has to be removed" Maruti Rao concluded his speech and it was followed by the head of the village panchayat, and headmaster and other important people of the village. They all praised him for his efforts in developing their village.

After completing the meeting Maruti Rao and his caravan of local leaders and village people said good bye to the gathering and are on their way to the city. When their jeep was on the road and about a furlong away from the village, it was stopped by six armed militants. In spite of the resistance from the villagers they persisted on taking Maruti Rao with them to have a talk with their leaders. This group is headed by Yadaiah

“You take us instead of our MLA,” the villagers insisted. The village Sarpanch Yellaiah pleaded for mercy.

“We are not going to do any harm to him. Send him alone.” Said Yadaiah, the leader of the group.

“We don’t agree.

The people at a distance suspected something foul and started running towards the jeep.

Yadaiah fired into the air. He tried to pull out Maruti Rao from the jeep.

Maruti Rao got down from the jeep and followed the militants.

“Don’t follow us! If you value your MLA’s life and yours, stop where you are!” yelled Yadaiah.

They moved into the thickets by the side of the road still firing into the air. From there they walked briskly for a while ...

DHAM... DHAM... DHAM...

Hearing the rifle sounds people in the jeep and people from the village converged towards the thickets. There amidst the pool of blood Maruti Rao was found H.C. was struggling for life.... struggling for life. They also saw Yadaiah and his comrades going fast into the hillocks. Some youth tried to pursue them but the burst of the rifle fire from the militants stopped them on their toes.

Potaram villagers were stunned by this unfortunate incident and started crying seeing the dead body of their beloved leader who a few minutes ago moved and talked with them. They claimed themselves as the real cause for his death. ‘We ourselves brought you here. We ourselves brought your death to our door step’ they burst into tears. We promised our lives to your safety. But we have lost you while we are still alive...

Police arrived at the scene. His body was brought to Hakimpet after postmortem.

People of his constituency in thousands came to see his dead body. His wife Sujatha was unconscious with a shock. Sukhender Reddy arrived and cried bitterly. His heart is shattered.

“What have you done Maruti? We lived like twins? You have gone to the distant shores alone. You did not heed my advice. See! What happened now! Without you why should I be in these dirty politics? Everybody criticizes but who recognizes our services? I am submitting my resignation and leaving politics forever” Wept Sukhender Reddy uncontrollably.

In the funeral procession of Maruti Rao everybody in the Hakimpet constituency participated voluntarily. It took eight hours to reach the cremation site. Many MLAs, officials, and others attended the last rites. On behalf of the CM, the home minister had attended the funeral and paid tributes. Many heart rendering scenes which dominated the procession, were recorded by the media and the onlookers.

One journalist quizzed Sukhender Reddy about his resignation.

“Yes! I write it now. Here! Go and give it to the speaker! You think we politicians are liars and you are the truth hunters. You write with all your might that politicians are selfish and tyrants. You praise the killers as revolutionaries. What sacrifices they have made? Tell me! What atrocities did Maruti Rao commit on the people? How much money has he earned? How much gold and jewelry he gave to his wife? How much land he grabbed from the poor? How many buildings he owned? Nothing they killed such a selfless man. Yes! I am born into a family of landlords. And our manager insulted a woman who belonged to weaker section. For that reason they killed my brother. They tried to kill me many times. By god’s grace, I am still alive. But in their attempts to kill me they killed many innocent people. Some day they may succeed in killing me and they may give statements that they have

eliminated one brute of a landlord. You publish that news with all fanfare. But tell me! What about Maruti Rao? He was born in a backward weaver community. Because he is my friend, my family helped him in his education and politics. I myself brought him into the politics... but politics did not spoil him. He brought credit to the politicians. Then why did your people murder him? Are they human beings or devils incarnate? If anybody dies in an encounter you and your papers cry hoarse and make it a big issue. The human rights group gives a statement that it is a fake encounter! Why then the same group remains silent about the day light murder of Maruti Rao? Today, another Gandhi is murdered. Humanity is murdered. Man has become demon once more. History won't forgive them. Poor people, they themselves cannot forgive and forget this dastardly act.

You want my resignation. Come and take this. I will write it here. Go and hand it over to the Speaker! Come on! What is this MLA's post for? When my close friend... my life... my right hand ...my heart... when I lost that ... what is the use of such ornamental posts...

This life is of no use... give me some poison... I will die!" Sukhender Reddy went on speaking like this....

"Sukhender Reddy, relax. Don't mind these pen pushers. They don't know the time and occasion to grill the people. You tell something in your grief and they give it a different colour and different version. So please stop making any more statements." Kodadarama Reddy his lieutenant said

"How can I tolerate this! My heart bleeds," answered Sukhender Reddy.

"Relax. Cool down! This is not the time to make statements even if somebody provokes you. See mister! Why do you flare up his emotions? He is in grief because of his friend's death. Further he has high BP. Please we will discuss it later" –

Kodandaram Reddy intervened. But the reporter repeated the question, “Is he ready to submit his resignation for his M.L.A. ship?”

“He will or he won’t... why are you so particular about it? This is none of your business? Please leave us alone. Resignation cannot be a person’s decision. Party has to accept it. The Cadre too. Please go! And don’t pester us,” said Kodandaram Reddy.

In the morning all newspapers published the photos and news of the final journey of Maruti Rao and added that Sukhender Reddy and his right hand Kodandaram Reddy misbehaved with the reporters who went to cover the funeral of Maruti Rao. Sukhender Reddy was harsh and looked dubious in submitting his resignation, they wrote.

But the next day Sukhender Reddy submitted his resignation to the speaker amidst the protests from his friends and wellwishers.

Two days later revolutionaries released their statement. It was in all the leading newspapers. “MLA Maruti Rao was not that great person as popularized. He created that illusion among the innocent people. We know how much he earned as an MLA. His developmental programs helped the landlords to earn money but not the poor. Even our own cadre believed his words and surrendered to the police. It is no more a secret how much money police gave him to break our back. In the four encounters that took place recently in his constituency many of our warriors lost their lives. More than that, he is the best friend and follower of the oppressor Sukhender Reddy. We warned Maruti Rao many times about his nefarious activities. We requested him to use his influence to put an end to the false encounters. But he did not heed our advice. More than the bad people the society is taken for a ride by the people who was branded as good. That is why we had to kill Maruti Rao.”

Many people were baffled by this statement and thought “might be it is true! Who can predict what type of snake lies hidden in that deep mound?”

Assembly paid Maruti Rao a great tribute. All parties irrespective of their differences paid homage to the slain leader. Everybody praised his tireless work in the development of his constituency in all fronts. Opposition leaders pointed out the lapses in his protection. They questioned the integrity of the revolutionaries in killing the leader who walked tall among his contemporaries. They suggested that it is for the good of the society if the revolutionaries leave the present path of violence and join the social mainstream.

Assembly was adjourned for the next day after paying rich tributes to Maruti Rao.

Speaker did not accept the resignation submitted by Sukhender Reddy. Later nobody talked about it. And that matter went unnoticed.

In the re-elections that took place after six months, Maruti Rao's wife Sujatha was given the party ticket. Though the ruling party fielded their candidate Sujatha won the election with huge majority. She gave her assurance to the people and promised them that she would continue her husband's work and develop it in all fronts. People felt happy as they could express their gratitude to some extent by electing her in the place of their leader Maruti Rao.

15

Tipparthi is a village near Hakimpet. The police have got information that Yadaiah's squad is taking shelter in a teacher's house. It is a fact that the police intelligence wing is highly refined and every village is infiltrated by informers.

They raided the teacher's house in the middle of the night. The house is on the outskirts of the village and the firing continued

till the early morning. The police announced that the owner of the house and his wife and two other unidentified persons were found dead in the house but Yadaiah and his squad members could escape in the darkness of the night.

Revolutionaries in their statement explained that this one is also a fake encounter and police killed the innocent teacher and his wife and other two unidentified persons in cold blood.

As nobody claimed the bodies of the unidentified persons the police themselves cremated the dead bodies. They took the bodies of the teacher and his wife to their village and cremated them on a single pyre.

To believe or not to believe! The police version or the militants' version, which is true? People had a dilemma for a while and later they forgot both in their routine.

* * * *

Narender Reddy is the brother of Sukhender Reddy but he is away from the politics. He has worked as a Tahasildar and he has been promoted as RDO (Revenue Divisional Officer) recently. His son Vineel is studying M.Tech in IIT- Delhi. He married his two daughters to engineers who settled in America and they migrated there soon after their marriage. He decided to send his son to America soon after completion of his M.Tech.

Vineel Reddy thought of spending his second semester holidays with his family in his native town Vangala. So he requested his father to apply for leave and spend some time with him. "I would like to spend these holidays with you all, dad" Vineel phoned his father. His father was happy. "Great, son, getting leave is in my department a rare thing. But I will manage it. And when you are coming the rest of the things are trivial for me. Tomorrow I will speak to my higher officials."

"Thank you dad! Inform this to mummy... by fifth of next month you all be at Vangala... Please request my grandparents also to come to Vangala for a day or two from their village."

“ Okay I will invite all of our close relatives.”

“Not all, dad. This time I must be away from those dirty politics. So do not inform our politician clan. I shall visit them later,” said Vineel Reddy.

“I know that, dear son.”

“We – you, mummy, me, grandfather and grandmother – that’s all”

“OK” – their conversation ended.

Narender Reddy owns a two storied building in Vangala town. Most of the time it is vacant and only during holidays and in frequent family gatherings it is inhabited. His job requires frequent transfers and this house is like a guest house for them.

Vineel’s grandparents, the mother and father of Lalithamma, the wife of Narender Reddy arrived from Tippiarhi. Lalithamma was very happy to see her parents.

Vineel came to Vangala on fifth of that month and received well by all. His parents and grandparents were so happy to see him that tears rolled from their eyes.

“Hi grandpa! Hi grandma!! » Vineel embraced his grandparents with joy.

“After so many days... *mera dil bhar gaya re*” said Narayana Reddy. (my heart is filled...) – Narayana Reddy is his maternal grandfather. His conversation was full of Urdu sentences and couplets. Under Nizam’s rule all the landlords learnt the official language Urdu and were proficient in it. Narayana Reddy also mastered the language. He had two daughters. No sons. Lalithamma was the elder one. So he distributed his property to both of his daughters equally and retained some for his maintenance.

They spent their time happily for a week. Two more days were left for Vineel to leave for Delhi. His grandfather suggested

visiting Tipparthi.” Dear boy! Let us go to my place. Kab *Bole tho kal... hamara gaao tak jaake aayenge re* (tomorrow we shall go to my village and come back.)

Vineel asked “why now to that village, grand pa?”

“Villages are good to look at. You always stay in cities. Just for a change you can visit a village, my village. We have mango and orange orchards there. They are lovely gardens. *Kal subah jaake sham tak aayenge* (we can go in the morning and come back by evening)

“Why going to the village, sir! They have become quite rotten these days. Dirty politics everywhere!?” said Narender Reddy.

“We have nothing to do with politics? We go directly to our house. Have lunch. He will have the finest goat meat for lunch. *Do pahar me khana khane ke baad* (after taking lunch food) we can spend time in our beautiful gardens. *Sham tak vaha tahareng* (till evening we can stay there) then we can drive back here.” – said Narayana Reddy.

“Why do you go to Tipparthi now? - Lalithamma too objected.

“Tell me! When did my grandson visit his mother’s village? *Ek jamana gujar gaya* (one generation passed away). We will have some fun there.

“OK Grandpa, let’s go.”

“We are not. We have to prepare the sweet eatables like Laddoos and Chakinaas to be taken by Vineel to Delhi.”

“*Koi baath nahin* (no problem). You can stay. My son-in law, my grandson and I will go!?” said Narayana Reddy.

“I will drive the car,” Vineel requested.

Narayana Reddy sent his driver to his village with instructions to the house keeper Ilaiah to make arrangements for their visit tomorrow.

Around 9A.M. in the morning all three – father-in law, son- in law and son- drove towards Tippiarhi village, which is forty kilometers away from Vangala town

“Please come early. Don’t wait till night.” Lalithamma warned them

“Yes, don’t spend too much time there! Be back here by this evening.” Parvathamma, wife of Narayana Reddy, mother of Lalithamma echoed her daughter’s sentiments.

Recently the road to Tippiarhi is black topped and Vineel is jubilant in driving his favorite Grey colored Maruti Esteem. It zoomed past towards its destination..

By 10 o’clock they reached their ancestral house built by Ramachandra Reddy, father of Narayana Reddy. During the peasant movement in Trilinga Island the building was destroyed by the revolutionaries of those days who were called “Sangam” and was renovated by Narayana Reddy. The building occupied almost half of the village.

They were received by their house keeper Ilaiah. Knowing his arrival the village elders came to see Narayana Reddy. “He is my grandson. Doing M.Tech, in IIT, Delhi. You know! It is not easy to get a seat in that institute. *Mera potha sher hai* (my grandson is a lion). He introduced Vineel to the visitors.

“Lion’s son is a lion, sir! Your grandson is virile and dashing.” Somi Reddy - ex-Munsab (patel) of that village, exclaimed.

“Where is your son-in law working, sir, at present?” enquired ex-patwari- Venkateswar Rao.

“In Kamalapur, how are you panthuloo?” Narender Reddy asked him.

“Not so good sir! This new government had cut our tails!?” said he.

“What is this tail trimming grandpa! I don’t understand,” asked Vineel

Naryana Reddy laughed loudly and said “this new government has abolished the age old institutions of patel-patwari system. So now they have become airless tubes.”

“The seer Brahman predicted that a fellow who plays on the screen shall rule this land. That has become true and he has trimmed our tails. The Time is bad. Ships become carts and carts may become ships in the passage time. What is going to happen... Only god knows,” sighed Venkateswar Rao.

They left after spending some time with such casual talk for a while.

Naryana Reddy made so many arrangements for celebrating the arrival of his grandson. A young goat meat was prepared into a delicious cuisine. Corn fried on slow fire was seasoned with butter and red spice powder was served to his son-in law and grandson. They enjoyed for some time watching television. And Vineel had all praises to his grandfather. “Fantastic, grandpa! Delicious! Never tasted this sort of food, I like this village. I like your house. I feel like staying here all my life.”

“Let us go to our orange orchards,” suggested Narayana Reddy.

“OK Grandfather... we are at your service... we do whatever you wish,” said Vineel.

All the three were blessed with good looks and charming personalities. Narayana Reddy was around seventy years with silver white hair, with many wrinkles prominent on his bleached red face, spectacles hiding his tired looks but effectively projecting his past royalty... attired in traditional milky white dress with a neat towel over his shoulder giving him a special dignified look...

respected by the local people... he started towards his orchards with the other two.

Narender Reddy is in his half-white safari suit. He always quiet by nature. People say that there is that much difference as with an elephant to a mosquito when compared to his brother Sukhender Reddy who is talkative and flamboyant.

Vineel took after his grandfather. Good height. Nice red complexion, wrinkled lustrous hair, always in-shirt tucked, like a cinema hero he is the cynosure of all eyes.

They reached the garden by their car and wandered for a while in those serene, lovely orchards. This is the only property now Narayana Reddy owns. Before the Ceiling Act he sold out some land. Quite a bit he lost in the ceiling. In some land, revolutionaries put their mark of red flags. So in that land he stopped cultivation. He decided to convert his farmland to mango and orange orchards. Every year he gives them to the contractors for a fixed amount of lease and his annual income reaches around twenty to thirty thousand rupees.

After spending some time in their orchards they returned to the house. Narayana Reddy invited the important people of his village for the lunch. The sumptuous feast was over by 3 pm. After relaxing for a while they prepared to go and the time was five P.M. and the winter darkness started to creep in.

Driver Nazeer joined them but Vineel took the steering wheel. In the back seat father- in law and son-in law got settled. The villagers gave them warm farewell.

Vineel started the car making way through the surrounded children of the village. They were going on the bank of the village pond surrounded by thick groves of custard apple trees. A young man going in front did not give the side to the car despite of the car horn honking. In fact he slowed down his pace. So Vineel too slowed down his car to a halt.

Suddenly the cyclist turned his bicycle into the nearby bushes and vanished. The very moment four armed militants pounced upon the car and fired indiscriminately. All the four inside the car died on the spot. The car lost control and slipped into the lake. The water turned bright red with the blood of the deceased. Within a few minutes the village people came running there and found the ghastly scene. In less than an hour the police received the information and reached the spot.

At about eight 'o' clock in the night Lalithamma came to know the disaster news of terrible. Like a tree struck by lightning she fell unconscious. In the hospital she regained consciousness but she cried aloud saying, "It is a lie. What you are telling me is not true. My Vineel won't go leaving me alone. My husband promised me to be always with me. He never goes back by his word. My father goes nowhere without telling me... you are all lying ... God never does such an injustice it to me... we harm nobody...it is a lie... a lie."

Women all around, unable to console her, were burst into tears as. "Even our enemy should not suffer this sort of misfortune. For whom should she cry... for her son? Husband? Or for her father? How she can survive this onslaught?"

Lalithamma was crying repeatedly before she went into debirium. Doctor examined her.

"She is in a state of shock. It will take some time for her to recover," he said.

Her mental status was not normal when she was recovered from shock. "You know! Our Vineel is going to Delhi. For him I prepared plenty of laddoos (sweet meat) and chakinas (hot chips like). How will he take them to Delhi. I will send our driver Nazeer with him. My husband has to go to Kamalapur tomorrow. I have to keep his suitcase ready. Why do you keep me here? I have so much work to do. Our Vineel has to go to Delhi... My husband to Kamalapur... and my father to Tipparthi. Let me go home," saying so she was about to get up from her bed.

“Don’t get up, sister. Your health is not good. Try to have some sleep” said her sister Sarojanamma who came from her village knowing about this tragic incident.

“How can I get sleep? There is so much work to do. I have to bid farewell to three. Do you think that it will be so easy to send them off all at a time?” she argued weeping.

The onlookers also wept aloud moved by her wailing words.

“Why do you cry? Have you gone mad? What is your problem if I give send off to my people? You need not do anything. I will do it on my own. You just see me doing,” thus speaking incoherently she again became unconscious.

The media and the newspapers highlighted this news. The scribes described her agony in prolific words.

Sukhender Reddy came and wept like a child seeing his brother’s lifeless body.

“All this is because of this person. Because of him how many more have to die? murmured Lalithamma’s brother.

“They should have killed Sukhender Reddy but not these people. This is not fair,” said some of the villagers of Tippiarthi.

In the melee people forgot about the driver Nazeer. He was bereaved by his wife, his two brothers and relatives. Government announced two lakh rupees ex-gratia to the deceased persons.

By the evening of next day the funeral rites were completed. Lalithamma was still in coma. “The government will crush the miscreants by iron foot. There is no place for violence in democracy,” the Chief Minister and other leaders gave their usual statements.

“Narayana Reddy is responsible for the police attack on the teacher’s house and Sukhender Reddy’s brother Narender Reddy is a corrupt official and that’s why they were punished by

the people but we feel sorry for the death of the driver Nazeer. But, these mistakes are imminent and they are part of the revolutionary struggle.” The revolutionaries released their statement to all the news dailies which published these statements as they were.

16

“I am sick of this education. I don’t like it,” said Suneela to her classmate Samyukta.

“Tell me something that you like?” asked Samyukta. They were on the college campus.

“I wish I did something which others couldn’t. Something sensational!” Suneela said.

“Just do it! Something sensational, yes. Fall in love with that rowdy...Vinaykumar and screw him, ...that will be really sensational,” Samyukta advised her.

“No, no! That is a waste of time. In that case hooking the Economics lecturer Srikanth is more suitable physically and aesthetically,” Suneela had her plans very clear.

“Yes, you can try. Often he ogles at you. Good fish to catch and elope,” said Samyukta.

“When did you observe his looks at me?” Suneela.

“Dozen a dime and daily game. You are a red rose. Everybody wants to have a look at you.” Samyukta stirred her friend’s attention.

“Alas! Nobody gives you a wink.”

“Who has such guts? I am black and blue. Not anybody’s favorite color,” Samyukta said.

They went into the classroom. They are in the final year intermediate course in the local private junior college. Sudheshna, the English lecturer was taking their class. But Suneela was far

away from the classroom. Her mind is filled with Srikanth and his passionate personality. This guy is very handsome and good looking. In some angles and style he excels the other chaps in the college. Looks golden red and gorgeous. May be God had made him to be her companion. Looks like an American cowboy, ready for the charge. With in-shirt dress he appears stylish and more than that of his teaching, his movements got her into the fold of cupid's zone.

So she started observing him. And she is aware of her talent and her charming beauty which makes the onlookers turn back and notice. She is the red rose of the college. The boy's college guys do wait and stand up for her to have a look at her every day.

Suneela's native place Thoorpugudem is sixty kilometres away from Vangala town. She completed her school education there itself. Having not much love with her studies she lived in her own world of thoughts. She was the only daughter of her mother. Sumathi lost her husband long ago who succumbed to a chronic disease. Though they belonged to middle class family, they were now left with a few acres of farmland and the annual income from it was almost negligible. Her brothers and sisters were rich and they helped her in many ways. With their support she lived comfortably and brought her up in a royal manner. She wished her child to become either an engineer or a doctor.

Two cousins of Suneela were living in the city of Hyderabad. Suneela believed that they were rich. She liked her cousin's high culture, their style of living in the capital city, their homes equipped with ceiling fans, color televisions, VCRs, refrigerators, air coolers, Kinetic Honda Motor bicycles, Maruti cars... oh! She liked them all. So she often had small and big fights with her mother and somehow succeeded to live along with her cousins in that rich and style. It was her mother's headache to beg, borrow or steal. Often her mother protested "They have money. We are poor. Why do you imitate them? It is beyond our capacity to live in that style. "

“Why? You all belonged to the same family. Then how come you are so poor and they are so rich? Your father gave them good education. Good marriages. For you, a sick person who died prematurely and left us in penury. Then why did you raise me? I have a right to be rich. They have a responsibility to help us. Get that and let me live the way I like,” Suneela has a way of getting her things done.

After finishing high school education she got admission in a junior college. The teachers helped her in her tenth class examinations to pass with good marks. She stayed in the hostel maintained by the college management for a while but the rules and regulations bothered her. She wanted to get out of that prison. She hated taking permission of the warden to go out of the hostel. For her, going out whenever her mind demands is important. Making friendship with boys, teasing them, making them mad after her beauty are the sports she liked. She feels discriminated as the society allows boys to do whatever they like, but restricts girls and women. Why are they not human beings? Do they not need any freedom?

She wants to rebel and fight against this discrimination.

After a series of argumentative fights with her mother she left the hostel and started staying in a single roomed rented house. The house owners know her mother and their family. She is now a free bird.

Soon she stopped cooking food (which she disliked) and frequented the hotels and eateries with the money she has extracted from her mother by threats and fights. As there is no alternative her mother pawned her land to a money lender to satisfy her daughter's needs. “I may lose one acre of land but my child will be happy,” she thought.

Suneela now has many boyfriends. Like seasons she changed them frequently. But she considered her friendship with Economics lecturer Srikanth is the real one. He was a fresh post graduate and was given a temporary job and was paid a meagre

two thousand rupees a month. Srikanth noticed her interest in him. So he allowed her to come nearer to him. Thus began a love story.

One day Srikanth saw her alone in a theatre campus. After mutual greetings he bought the tickets for both and watched the movie. This was the starting point and then it became a regular event for them to meet every day at some place or the other. Srikanth started going to her room also. The house owners informed this matter to her mother Sumathi.

She tried to reason her daughter. But Suneela was in no mood to hear her lecture. "What is this Suneela? This is not the right thing to see a guy visiting an unmarried girl in her room," said her mother.

"What is wrong? He is my lecturer. We are going to get married soon," answered Suneela.

"You have not even completed Intermediate. Then how can you talk about marriage?" said Sumathi.

"I don't want to study. It is damn boring," Suneela was reckless in her reply.

"I've been dreaming to see you study well and become a big doctor," pleaded her mother.

"How can I be responsible for your dreams? Stop that nonsense," Suneela was curt.

After hearing their loud argument, the house owner intervened, "What is this child? You have to respect your mother and her age."

"Why do you interfere in our argument? Better you get lost!" Suneela roared.

"Good! It is my mistake to offer you room for rent. You are a thankless braggart," the house owner quipped.

“You have not given it for free of cost. You are taking good amount of rent.”

“What rent? I thought you belong to a respectable family. But you bring somebody to your room at odd hours which we cannot accept.”

“Shut up, old woman! You cannot dictate terms to me. Damn your room! Damn you!”

“Now you are beyond correction. I can’t tolerate you in my premises any more. Please vacate the room instantly,” the house owner warned her very clearly.

Sumathi tried to pacify her but in vain.

“We will vacate your damn house. You don’t worry. Mother! I don’t care even your words too. By tomorrow morning we shall vacate this sinister house and shift to a better one.”-

Suneela went out in search of a new house. After a day long search she was able to look at a two-roomed portion but the rent was thousand rupees a month and she gave five hundred rupees as an advance amount and informed this to her mother. Sumathi was aghast.

“Where can I get five hundred more every month? Already it is beyond my capacity. Please search for another house,” Sumathi pleaded with her daughter.

“No, no more arguments about that issue. It took me a whole day to find a room suitable for my taste. The house owners are very cultured. They do not spy on you and disturb you like the CIDs. I like this house. All the members of their family are employees. They understand the value of personal freedom. I gave them five hundred rupees as an advance too!”

“I cannot support you if you go that way. Better, if you search for a job and earn yourself for your luxuries. I don’t have money,” said Sumathi.

“Always you sing the song with same tune. No money! No money! All your brothers and sisters are well settled. Why you only must be poor? Go and ask your father. Demand a fair share of property. Why were you married to a sick man and ruined your life? Why they have good property and you have only poverty?”

“It is their luck. My father got married me to a rich and decent man but unfortunately he succumbed to a chronic disease. His disease cost us our lands and his life.”

“What is that luck? Sell one more acre and we will see and be ready when the next time luck knocks at our door. But don’t tell me we have no money.”

“What about your marriage, dear?”

“You just need not worry about it. No dowry. No property. I’ll go by my own choice,” Suneela was stubborn.

“Whom do you marry? That guy Srikanth! Do you know how much he is paid now? If marriage is of your choice, then choose a man who has a government job.”

“Why do you interfere in my life again? Can’t you keep quiet?”

“If not I who will tell you about what is good and what is bad? Why do you talk like this? You have lost your mind.”

“Have I lost my mind? OK, I am no more a human being. OK let me live my life. I do not like anybody coming in my way. I don’t care anyone. Even you!” Suneela went into her bad moods.

“Then you don’t talk to me. Leave me alone and lead your own life.”

“You are my mother and you have the responsibility of keeping me furnished for two more years. Later I won’t beg for your help. I won’t even show my face to you. OK!”

“Where do you go, daughter! Why do you utter such big words?”

“That will be my choice. You think I have become a heavy burden on you. Wait for two more years. I can get on myself.”

“You are my only daughter. If you behave like this what can I do?”

“That is what I insist on. If I were a son to you, would you treat me like this? There is much discrimination. This whole society is filled with male chauvinism. I hate it and hate it.”

As usual Suneela won the argument. That poor mother was left with no option. So they vacated the room and occupied the new rented portion located in a new colony. After two days Sumathi went to her village. Three more months passed. Suneela appeared for the intermediate examination. There was a rumour that Srikanth and Suneela were in love and the marriage was round the corner.

In summer holidays Srikanth was terminated from his job. He assured Suneela that the marriage would be considered when the college reopened. The holidays were jolly days for both of them. They became closer and closer. At the end of the vacation Srikanth told her that he was offered the principal post in a new college at a new place maintained by his relatives. She can come there and join the degree after completion of her Intermediate. “So we can live happily there after,” he promised.

“Great, you are becoming the principal. It is great. My joining your college as a student is really great. Hurry up! Go and join there and come with good news,” said Suneela said.

“I will take you there as soon as your results are announced,” promised Srikanth.

“How can I live without you?” she has tears in her eyes.

“Just ten days. I will be with you as early as possible.” Srikanth consoled her, touching her hands and chin with his.

Srikanth went away to take charge of new college as the principal.

Srikanth did not come. Intermediate results were announced. She failed.

Her mother came. “You wasted so much money and you failed the examination. Leave this city and come home... ” I have no money to feed you any more”.

“Money! Money! You always talk about money. I am not interested in your village. I have to appear for the supplementary exam,” Suneela was defiant.

“What can I do? Our whole property is being dwindled for your studies. Then from where I have to arrange money for your marriage?” Sumathi burst into tears.

“I told you not to worry about my marriage. I have to prepare for the supplementary exam. Don’t disturb me,” Suneela argued.

Sumathi left her and went to her village.

In the supplementary examination she bettered her performance and got through it.

She tried to find the whereabouts of Srikanth. She searched for him at the address given by him. Everything about Srikanth was proved wrong. Then she realised herself that she was deceived by Srikanth.

Then she received an invitation from Srikanth requesting her to attend his marriage. Tears moved in streams and her hatred against men reached sky high. “I will shoot the scoundrel if I see him again,” Suneela thought.

She joined B.A. There she met Sandhya who explained her about feminism and other issues. The society in which we are living is the patriarchal one. In this society, the male domination is severe and the women are oppressed by men in the name of tradition, culture and family bonds. She explained that the agenda of Feminist Movement includes acting as a counter to the patriarchal norms in our dominant culture. She said,

“Feminism is a struggle against sexist oppression.’ Whether he is brother, father, son, husband or anybody who is against woman’s freedom, there must always be a relentless struggle. Men who treat women as sexual objects must be punished.

Sandhya gave some books of feminist literature to Suneela. The study of those books had given her much insight due to which she understood the drama enacted by Srikanth. For her Srikanth is the representative of all the male chauvinistic pigs (MCPs). She wished to take revenge against him. She visualised Srikanth as being stripped, beaten and flogged at the cross roads. That picture gave her some solace.

She attended many meeting accompanied by Sandhya. She became a member in some of the feminist unions. She learnt to speak in the meetings, participated in processions, pickets and fasting. Her participation in all such activities was part of her daily chores. She was quite with her fight for the feminist cause and women’s liberation.

In the final year she met Sudheer. She was impressed by his extempore oration about feminism. He spew out fire on the male dominated society. “To root out this evil the only way is Marxist feminism. There are only two groups in this society. Haves and have-nots. Women come under have-nots. They are the oppressed ones in the male dominated society.

You know that. From her birth to death she is oppressed. What to eat, how to dress, what to talk, how to walk—everything is decided by men. As a child she is under the care of father, after marriage under the care of her husband, in the old age under the care of her son. Throughout her life she has to live under some male’s protection—our traditionalists proclaimed. At any time tell me my men... have we seen her, considered her as a human being... that she also has her own mind, and she has a body with blood and flesh... any time? No... for us she is a commodity. A living thing that fulfils man’s desire and satisfies his lust... A

machine that produces children... A vehicle that gives birth to son(s) who can deliver him from the hell Punnama...

Only Chalam, our beloved writer dared to defy and deny these age old opinions. He said she has her body as strong as men. It needs exercise. She has a mind of her own. It needs knowledge. She has her heart. It needs experience. Then we realized... yes... there is truth in his words. She is equal to man. Everywhere she has enemies... waiting for time and chance to dominate her... father, brother, husband... son... everybody... even the lovers... they betray her... I am a male too... but I will say that men are cruel and crude in treating women. They only see her as a sexual object.

Marxist feminists see contemporary gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender oppression is class oppression and the relationship between man and woman in society is similar to that of the relations between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression, which is maintained like racism because it serves the interests of the capitalists and the ruling class. The only way of liberating women from this cruel, strong, indestructible society is through the socialist revolution, with a special emphasis on work among women that would change their conditions after the revolution. Marxist feminism states that private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion, and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root cause of women's oppression in the context of the current social situation."

Sudheer reasoned that a classless society is possible only with Marxism where men and women destroy the age old classes like landlord and farmer, capitalist and worker, man and woman. In that classless society woman equally participates in the development of society and is respected. "So dear sisters! Don't stop with this feminism! but continue your journey towards

Marxism. Only Marxist- feminism can solve your problems. Long live revolution!" he concluded his talk.

That talk of Sudheer gave her an idea about Marxism. She befriended with Sudheer who helped her in understanding the society from the Marxist perspective. They discussed many issues pertaining to people. Having participated in public meetings... she started believing in the possibilities of Marxist way of struggle against oppression. Meanwhile her friendship with Sudheer gradually developed into companionship. They stayed together everyday discussing the problems and solutions related to the society.

"What about the Parliamentary system in implementing the Marxist ideology?" Suneela asked.

"Impossible," said Sudheer

"Why do you think so?" asked Suneela.

"Our Parliamentary system has gone beyond its mending. This entire election process is a big farce. Money and muscle power rules the roost. This is a costly drama. If anybody wants to change this system then it swallows him too into its fold. This is a huge quagmire. If Marxism goes that way... it will be finished!"

"Then how do we achieve the classless society?" asked Suneela

"Armed struggle is the only solution. Other methods fail miserably. For example the parliamentary system," answered Sudheer.

"Then what happened in Soviet Russia? Armed struggle brought the communism there....But it failed...."

"That is not true Marxism. Nor it is communism. In 1917 it started as communism and slowly it changed its course and became social imperialism. That's why it collapsed."

"What about the communism in China?" Suneela asked.

“The present communism in China is ‘market socialism.’ When the leaders of China put an end to the Cultural Revolution brought by the great leader Mao Tse-tung there itself the communism in China got derailed. They should have continued the elimination of the enemies of the society. Deng Xiao Ping who was purged twice during the Cultural Revolution but regained prominence in 1978 by outmanoeuvring Mao’s chosen successor, Hua Guofeng. Deng’s innocuous-sounding dictum, “it does not matter what colour a cat is as long as it hunts mice,” but he was the man who damaged the Marxism there. Revolution is a continuous process. It will not stop after a stipulated period. It continues till the end of selfishness and brutality in an individual. It should continue till man becomes a complete socialist human being.

Communism is a political philosophy which argues that men should have equal rights to wealth. Marxism is a way of understanding by analysing the organisation and structure of society. It is also a way of understanding how the societies develop and change. All societies are divided into two groups. Owners and workers. Our society is capitalistic. Owners are bourgeoisie; and workers are proletarians. The worker becomes all the poorer as the more wealth he produces. This is the great injustice in the capitalist society. Marx predicted that wealth be possessed by fewer and fewer people in such society. The workers would eventually realise their power and position and overthrow the bourgeoisie. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. There will be an armed revolution and this revolution succeeds in establishing the classless society.” The seeds of destruction of capitalist system are inbuilt in the capitalist system itself.”

“When do you think it will happen?” asked Suneela.

“Any time!... May be today... tomorrow... after ten years... ten decades or centuries!... but it is certain... as certain as the sun rises in the east,” Sudheer is confident.

“Do you think that communism exists anywhere in the world now?” asked Suneela.

“No! Now there is no communism in the truest terms! It is not there!”

“What is your opinion regarding the revolutionary struggle in our Trilinga Island?”

“Hats off to them! They are fighting for a cause... Sacrificing their lives for a principle.... for a cause. Sacrificing everything! My thanks to them,” Sudheer answered her queries.

“Some say that they are killing innocent people, destroying public property, trying to destabilize the democratically elected governments. And there is no place for violence in democracy,” Suneela continued her questionnaire.

“Nonsense! Utter nonsense! In any great revolution some innocent people will definitely die. Tell me which political party has abstained from destroying the public property? They scorched the buses... in any protest whatever that is vulnerable and available at that point of time the protesters anger diverted towards that and that leads to destruction. And about these elections... everybody knows... what happens during elections!. Unlimited money and muscle power is used to win the elections, conducted in neither free nor fair environment and you consider the government thus formed as a lawful government? Nobody is sure when that moment of free and fair elections will be held in this island. Whoever spends crores of rupees is bound to win the elections. He only forms the government. He frames rules in such a way that will help him recover the expenses. For him people are expendable. To protect himself and his cronies he sends armies against rebels who are born among the people. He proclaims that there is no place for violence in democracy. This is not a democracy. It is a way of oppression committed by the haves upon the have-nots. That is why revolutionaries are adopting the only available weapon—the armed struggle. The violence that erupts

from that struggle is due to the resistance against the state violence.”

Suneela was mesmerized by the flow of his knowledge. She believed that Sudheer has some superhuman powers.

Suddenly Sudheer disappeared. One year passed like one day for her. She tried to know about his whereabouts but in vain. She liked him so much for his thoughts, words, actions and every gesture of his, amazed her.

Nobody knew his particulars. Whenever she enquired about him with others they used to reply-“why are you asking us? You both have been bosom friends for the last one year. What more we know than you?” She searched for him everywhere. With broken heart, puzzled mind she roamed here and there for three months. Now her only goal is to find Sudheer. She was damn sure that he went underground and was on a secret mission.

Sumathi came back to city and stayed with her daughter.

“My daughter has gone mad. Somebody might have played witchcraft on her.” Sumathi thought.

One day Suneela was baffled by a freak thought. “If he has gone underground why can’t she join him? Both can work for the party and poor.” This thought slowly grew up with time and one midnight she left the house even without informing her mother. She knew that Kotthakonda village harboured revolutionaries. She took a bus and in the early morning she reached the village. There she enquired about Sudheer. She enquired about the revolutionaries. Some thought she was out of her mind. Some asked her what was the purpose of enquiry about revolutionaries.

“I wish to join them. Sudheer is my friend. I am telling you the truth. Take me to the revolutionaries. Let me see my Sudheer,” she pleaded with them.

In the evening a person called Balram met her. Nobody knew about him in that village. Balram promised her to take her to the hide out of the revolutionaries. He grilled her with questions. Her answer was the same “I know Sudheer. He is my friend. My teacher... My god. “He is my Marx.” She said.

The next day morning Balram took her into the nearby forest.

* * * *

Ten days after this incident somebody found her dead body by the side of the road. She was almost bare with torn clothes. Somebody going by that road, covered that body with a cloth.

“Suspecting her as police informer, revolutionaries must have tortured and killed her” was the police version.

“The Police must have arrested her, interrogated her, tortured her, gang raped and killed her. We have nothing to do with her death,” the revolutionaries gave their statement.

People got no clue from these two statements as which one was true.

17

The express bus is going in full speed on the black topped tar road. It stretches from Afsarabad to Teegalapally. The special feature of Teegalapally is the big lake frequented by visitors. It supplies water to about three thousand acres of land. During the plantation and harvest season this village is buzzed with agricultural labourers coming from all the nearby villages. This bus is also tightly packed with them.

The road is newly sanctioned and requisitioned in a record time. It connects Afsarabad with Teegalapally for a distance of two hundred kilometres. It passes through the forest and the grapevine gardens. The main purpose of this road is to facilitate the police to reach the forest with ease. And the forest is the best hide out for the revolutionaries.

It is the harvest time. There is a bee line of agricultural workers to Teegalapally.

The bus is jam packed with about twenty three women, five children, twenty five men, driver and conductor... a total of fifty five. Except two, all of them are agricultural labourers. Pratapa Reddy and Raghava Rao both are landlords. Each of them owns twenty acres of paddy fields watered by the big lake. They live in Afsarabad with their families but they stay occasionally in Teegalapally especially during the busy seasons of agriculture.

The bus is now in the green forest. In the evening light the road is shining like a black cobra. The forest is thick with dark green foliage. Teak, Sal, Neem, Peepal, Banyan and Bamboo trees are abundant in that area.

The road is smooth and straight like a black ribbon. People started dozing.

With a sudden jerk, the bus came to a halt. The driver noticed big boulders across the road and he at once applied brakes. Travellers in the back seat flew two feet up and were dropped down again on their seats. "Eh. Driver! Go a little bit slow!" somebody cautioned.

Four young men carrying petrol cans entered the bus. Driver suspected some foul play.

"Who are you? Why did you stop this bus?" the driver asked them.

"You will know that later. First hand over those two," they demanded.

"Who?" the driver asked.

"Those two! Pratapa Reddy and Raghava Rao," said one of them.

"Why? What they have done to you?" demanded Narasimhulu, the leader of the agricultural labourers.

“Shut up. Hand over them to us. Otherwise we will burn the bus with petrol,” quipped Madhu, the leader of the gang.

“Try. We will see how you do that,” replied Narasimhulu.

“One more word from you, we will hack you to pieces,” warned another.

“Come on! Kill us! We are no cowards!?” said Rajaiah, the friend of Narasimhulu

“Who are you? Revolutionaries?” the driver asked.

“That’s none of your business? All of you get down the bus. We need to talk to them. After that we will send them back. Understand!”

“You want to kill, kill us all. But we don’t allow you to go as you wish,” said Narasimhulu.

“This is the last warning! Hand over those two. Otherwise we will burn this bus. All of you will die. You hear me... This is the final warning!”

“Get lost you fellows! You are just four! We are fifty..,” said Rajaiah.

Rajaiah got up from his seat. Another five also did the same thing.

“We do not have any enmity with you. You oblige us. Otherwise the consequences will be terrible,” Madhu warned them again.

“They are good to us. They have paid us well. They have never ill treated us. We do not allow any harm to them,” Rajaiah and other men argued.

“You do not understand how much they have exploited you and your labourers. They are our class enemies. Unless we eliminate these class enemies the society will not go forward. You are an ignorant lot. Our struggle and fighting is for you people.

Understand and get out of our way. Come on. Don't waste our time." Madhu tried to explain their stance.

"They are our saviours. We do not allow any harm to them as long as we are alive," Rajaiah said.

Rajaiah and his friends moved from their seats and started to clash with the miscreants to snatch away the petrol cans, but Madhu and other men poured the petrol in the bus. Amidst of shouting and crying the both sides were in frenzy. Emotions raised. Madhu started waving the match box and match stick and cried, "One step forward I will throw this on the petrol! You miserable fools!"

Rajaiah and the others did not stop. Only one second. Madhu went mad. He ignited the match stick and threw it on the petrol which was already spreading. The fire was spread all over the bus within seconds. The four miscreants tried to get out of the bus, but one was trapped in the bus.

Cries and shouts reached the sky. Many tried to escape the burning fire. In that stampede, smoke and flames many women and children lost their lives. Some charred to death. Some got suffocated. Some got trampled under the feet of others. A lucky few could break open the window mirrors and jumped out of the bus. The driver escaped with life. The landlords were safe. The conductor lost his life. All this happened in a fraction of a second. Total forty people out of fifty five perished in that incident. One miscreant was also burnt alive in that horrible and foolish action.

The world came to know about this incident when another bus came that way after half an hour.

* * * *

By early morning all the newspapers covered the ghastly news in big and bold red letters.

Television channels went on showing the charred bus and burnt bodies.

People reading and watching these scenes got shocked.

“Terrible! Terrible! What is this! Has man been turned into a predator? Has man lost his humanity? What happened to the Trilinga Island? Has it become a dumping round for the dead bodies? Can anybody find a solution for it?” people cried.

Intellectuals, politicians, labour union leaders, human rights associations, everybody condemned the terrible act. Who did this? it was everybody’s guess.

“We have nothing to do with this ghastly incident,” the revolutionaries gave their statement.

“If not they, who did this?” people searched for answers.

“I believe it is the blatant act of Police. To direct the public ire against the revolutionaries the police must have planned and executed it,” a sympathiser of revolutionaries and an intellectual said.

“This is the handiwork of the revolutionaries. No one in the world can resort to such ghastly act except these crazy guys,” the police condemned the incident.

After a few days, the revolutionaries gave a statement: “We plead guilty. This mistake is due to the inexperienced and hasty action of our members. We request the people to forgive us.”

People from all walks of life condemned it. Media and newspapers wrote fine editorials.

But this incident created a big stir among the public. Intellectuals, middle class people, teachers, doctors, lawyers, student unions, human rights groups... political groups and everybody started building up pressure on the government, to do something to end this senseless violence.

“Government has to come forward with a solution. It has the moral responsibility to invite revolutionaries for discussions,” – the human rights group said.

“Yes. Government must invite revolutionaries for the talks to establish peace,” everybody started saying.

“It is for the good of society. Otherwise our Trilinga Island will be filled with dead bodies. So talks for peace are the only solution,” women’s group too agreed.

All important magazines including those which had considerable reputation published articles in favour of talks and suggested their view points. People are ready to pay any amount of price for the government to invite revolutionaries for the talks,” they wrote.

The editors of news magazines, intellectuals and social scientists met the Chief Minister and requested him to start negotiations with the revolutionaries.

One after another...all unions of various sectors supported the idea of talks between the government and revolutionaries. Supporters of human rights, civil liberties, poets, writers, cinema heroes and actors, businessmen... everybody in the Trilinga Island... in a unified voice “we want peace... let this war end... government has to take initiative and invite revolutionaries for talks. Revolutionaries also will come out for discussions. Both sides have to respect the people’s wish. Both sides have forgotten to consider the people’s opinion in their ongoing war. There is no democracy. There is no democratic space. People are tired of this unending violence. You must put full stop to this mindless violence and solve the problems by way of talks in a friendly atmosphere.”

Sensing the public response to peace talks the government too agreed to the suggestion.

“The government is never against talks. If they promise to shun violence the government has no objection to invite them for the talks,” the Chief Minister said.

“Violence is not our motto. Ours is resistance. If the government stops fake encounters we shall have no reason for not coming for the talks,” the revolutionaries said.

‘Now both sides are in favour of talks, so let the talks begin,’ the media raised its hopeful voice.

“The famous social worker Vaidyanathan has been doing lot of exercise in this direction for a long time; he will be the right negotiator,” suggested a senior editor.

“Do you accept this suggestion?” the press reporters asked Vaidyanathan.

“If both sides are unanimous over my choice I shall be happy to be the negotiator,” replied Vaidyanathan. He was a senior government officer and worked for the welfare of the poor. He had a spotless career. He implemented effectively many developmental programs proposed by government to eradicate poverty. He broke the backbone of the middlemen and the broker system. He saw to it the government help reached directly to the beneficiary at the bottom. He has no property of his own. He is truthful. Peace loving, simple, straight forward, unselfish, patient, good thinker and patriot.

After retirement, he dedicated himself to achieve a single goal of putting an end to war between the government and revolutionaries. To achieve this goal he started a society: The Peace Society of Trilinga Island in which people from all walks of life joined as members. He spent all his time to bring the both warring sides to the conference table. He condemned the fake encounters by the police and in the similar tone he criticized the landmine blasts that killed the policemen and the killing of innocent people in the name of informers by revolutionaries.

He requested the revolutionaries and the government to settle the problems amicably through talks. He requested them to put an end to the mindless bloodshed. Both sides so far avoided that situation by offering some excuses but Vaidyanathan continued his efforts. Now the incident of Teegalapally bus burning was a turning point in this direction. The death of forty innocent people in a tragic manner made the public opinion stronger and

stronger for resolving the issues by peaceful means and both sides gave a nod for the talks with Vaidyanathan as their negotiator.

Vaidyanathan made some suggestions to create an amiable atmosphere during the peace talks. The peace society on behalf of Vaidyanathan appealed to the government to stop all combing operations and encounters by police, and to lift the ban on the movement of the revolutionaries. It also appealed to the revolutionaries to stop killing the police men and informers, land mine blasting, destroying public property and other such activities.

Government said that it is ready for the talks, if the revolutionaries come forward and surrender their arms; the revolutionaries said they are also ready for talks provided the government lifts the ban and stop killings in the name of encounters. So Vaidyanathan suggested that the issue of surrendering arms and weapons can also be discussed during talks.

The government on its behalf announced that it has withheld the combing and encounter operations and lifted the ban on revolutionaries.

Revolutionaries responded by announcing that they are also not going to kill the policemen and informers and they would stop the destruction of public property.

Government invited the underground leaders to come for the talks and it promised the safe passage to their representatives. Revolutionaries accepted it.

The peace society began to prepare the agenda.

For two months... peace prevailed everywhere. No encounters, no combing operations, no landmine or claymore mine blasts, no killing of class enemies... people were happy.

The date was fixed for the talks. Revolutionaries announced the names of their representatives. The central committee members Radhakrishna murthy and Nagaraju were

their official representatives. Media highlighted the news with much fanfare.

Both of them were the top most leaders. For the last three decades they have stayed underground and have become a nightmare for the police. They led many operations that took the lives of several landlords, and many constables and policemen. Government announced ten lakh rupees award over their heads. To see those leaders, people waited eagerly imagining them to be larger than the life heroes.

The government announced its representatives. The Home Minister and the Welfare Minister were going to participate in the talks.

Everyday in the land of Trilinga started discussing among themselves about the process and result of this unusual meeting. Leaders expressed their views and everybody voted for peace.

“What do they discuss? Are the revolutionaries ready to move away from their principle goal of rooting out the capitalist society and establish classless society by means of an armed struggle? Is the government ready to step down and invite revolutionaries to rule the land? If one of these is not possible how you can you expect anything good out of this meeting?” a senior writer expressed his doubts.

“How do the two parties with two diametrically opposite views and without any common agenda sit in a conference and discuss? Raising hopes among people is also a crime,” an ex-revolutionary said.

Nobody bothered about these doubting Thomases.

“We just don’t care how it occurs. We want peace. Both parties should try in this direction,” was the consensus among people.

Media published articles describing the background of the various struggles, the life histories of the underground leaders in

detail. TV Channels telecast many hours of specially designed programmes on the discussions about that peace talks. All important leaders gave their suggestions based on their experience. Most of them were hopeful but a few were pessimistic about the outcome of the talks.

Media was informed about the date and place of stay, when and where the representatives of revolutionaries would come out of the underground. They would be treated as guests and would be arranged safe passages for them to come and go after the talks are over.

People waited eagerly for that auspicious moment. Time moved faster than that of the usual one.

The place from where the two leaders of the revolutionaries were expected to emerge from their hide out was filled with media cameras and the press people. Television channels made their own arrangements to record the historical event and broadcast them all over. Ordinary people also gathered there to have a firsthand look at the revolutionaries the became famous.

The police also cordoned off that place. But their faces lost the sheen. They looked dull like the airless tubes, lamps without oil and snakes without fangs. Bad time! Arranging protection to the predators was an unprecedented and a thankless job. They could not convince themselves.

A festival environment dominated the place. People gathered there were jubilant and their hearts started beating fast as the time approached. At exactly 11.30 a.m there was some movement in that forest area. Everybody became alert. A great warm welcome was given to them as they came out of the forest area into the plain. They handed over their AK47 guns to their followers. The followers said good bye to their leaders and disappeared into the forest.

The two leaders came towards the meeting point with smiles all over their faces. Hundreds of cameras clicked non-stop. People cried with joy.

“Welcome to the revolutionaries! Long live the revolution! Salute to the people’s leaders!!”

People welcomed them with hearty greetings.

Cameramen were restless in fulfilling their jobs.

No ferocious tigers of the forest. No predator looks. The two leaders looked simple.

They looked like personified peace. Like white doves they donned white robes. They were all in smiles.

Are they the same people who eliminate their class enemies without compassion?

Who blasts land mines and claymore mines indiscriminately killing hundreds of people?

Reporters put their questions.

“What would be the outcome of these talks?”

“What are the main issues in the agenda?”

“If the talks become fruitful will you join the mainstream of society?”

“If the talks become successful is your party going to participate in the elections?”

“If you gain power what will be the first issue that you deal with?”

But the leaders remained silent. To some questions “we shall see!” and for some other questions ‘no comment!’ were their answers. Then they got into the police escorted vehicles.

Many vehicles followed them. The leaders were given a very warm welcome that is fit for the guests of importance such as the Prime Minister and Chief-Ministers.

* * * *

And they reached the capital city of Trilinga Island.

The streets were crowded with people to have a glimpse of the revolutionaries.

They were surprised to see them so simple and plain.

They lost themselves in the charisma and magical smiles of the two leaders, who came out from hide outs for first time.

People and leaders welcomed them in a big way.

* * * *

The talks began in a friendly atmosphere. The peace society under the aegis of Vaidyanathan acted as the mediator. The agenda was finalized.

Home Minister and the Welfare Minister represented the government.

The meeting hall was replete with the cameramen, the press reporters and senior officials.

Reporters of national and international television channels were ready on their job.

When the first day talks were over Home minister expressed his hope for a peaceful settlement. And added that day they concentrated on the issues to be discussed.

People went in large numbers to the five star hotel where the revolutionaries were staying and submitted their appeals, request letters, and applications for financial help.

Some people requested for the house sites, some urged them to take action against a corrupt officer, some for the

compensation for the displacement, some for engineering, or medical seats for their children, some against the real estate mafia, some against the corporate hospitals, some against the role of middle men and brokers... they submitted their applications with such appeals to the revolutionary leaders. Some admired them and suggested them to participate in the elections to clean the present society of its corruption. The applications submitted by the people reached in tonnes and tons indicating the lack of trust in the democratically elected government.

The talks went on for ten days. Both sides were unanimous in holding the talks in a friendly and congenial way. Vaidyanathan also confirmed it.

“We have an agenda with eleven issues and we’ll discuss them one by one... The implementation of Land Ceiling Act, distribution of surplus land, issuing revenue pass books of the lands marked with red flags planted by the revolutionaries, cancellation of civil and criminal cases against revolutionaries, and the surrender of militants to join the mainstream.”

“Do you think revolutionaries will accept the suggestion?” reporters asked Mr. Vaidyanathan.

“We shall discuss that issue in the next session” was the answer.

“Do you think there will be another session?”

“Yes, of course!”

The capital buzzed with the predictions of the outcome of the talks. Bets went for high stakes. Government offices, corporate sector, real estate people, taxi drivers, auto drivers, bus unions, teachers, lawyers, doctors, actors, judges, NGOs, IAS officers, poets, writers- everybody... discussing for hours together... on the same topic... Will the talks be fruitful or not? What will be the outcome of the talks?

It became the most popular topic in the history of the recent times.

“If this attempt fails history and future generations won’t excuse us. So it is for the benefit of the overall society we wish these talks must come to a fruitful end,” media emphasized. The applications by the people to the revolutionaries flooded in tons and tons are loaded into gunny bags.

“How is the food in your accommodation?” reporters enquired.

“If we take this sort of food, daily our body weights increase uncontrollably,” the revolutionaries said laughing. Reporters joined them. The meeting place blossomed with smiles and laughter.

The audience sitting before the televisions too smiled. Many expected good news.

The Home Minister announced. “The first round of talks have been completed and the next round will be soon on the cards.”

“What are the issues you have come to an agreement?” the reporters asked.

“We met, we discussed, we made the impossible, possible!” he said these words with lot of pride. “This is only the first step. We have to take many more such steps.”

“This is not the end. This is only the beginning. We brought both sides to the conference table creating a congenial atmosphere. This is a victory. In the next round of talks we will go further,” said Vaidyanathan.

“Good. We have some differences. I think we can sort them out in our next round of talks,” Radhakrishna Murthy, the representative of the revolutionaries stated.

And then, both the revolutionaries were given a grand farewell. Enthusiasm and hope remained in the minds of the

people. They welcomed the revolutionaries with hope and with the same spirit they gave them a warm farewell.

“And then both ten days of talks did not yield any solution or agreement even on a single issue?” wondered many observers of the drama of talks.

* * * *

Another three months passed off peacefully.

“Revolutionaries are moving with arms in the villages. That is illegal.” “They are collecting money by force.” “We no more tolerate these antisocial activities,” the police warned the revolutionaries. That statement is highlighted in the media and the newspapers.

“If revolutionaries carry arms and move in the villages, the government won’t tolerate. Law will take its own course,” said the Chief Minister.

“Weapons are part of our bodies. There is no way we leave them. This is all Chief Minister’s plan to avoid the second round of talks.” Revolutionaries replied.

“There will be no more talks, unless they lay down their weapons,” said the Chief Minister.

“See! The Chief Minister seems to have no interest in the talks. We have to suspect his integrity” the activists of the Civil Liberties expressed their doubts.

“The government agreed for the talks only because the public opinion was strong at that time. It has no interest in the talks now,” said another Marxist intellectual.

“They could have discussed this weapons’ issue in the second round of talks.” Human Rights Union leaders said.

“The revolutionaries never believed in the talks. Their idea is an armed struggle and they are clear about it. They used this condition of cease fire for procuring new and modern

weapons. They recruited some more people. They collected crores of rupees by force,” said a senior police official.

“Please avoid controversial statements that spoil the hard earned peaceful environment. Kindly co-operate for the second round of talks,” requested. Mr Vaidyanathan. He continued his efforts to bring both the parties to the second round of talks. But nobody cared.

The government did not take any initiative to invite the revolutionaries for second round of talks. Forests reverberated with rifle sounds once again. The six months of silence in the forests was shattered.

In one encounter two revolutionaries lost their lives.

“In the routine combing operations by police, the weapon wielding revolutionaries came face to face with the armed police. In spite of the warnings to surrender they started firing at the police. In defence police also replied with gun fire. Two revolutionaries lost their lives in this encounter.” The police gave their routine statement.

“This is a one hundred percent fake encounter. To be away from the second round of talks, the government has taken this nasty and cruel step. The police have to pay a heavy price for this stupid act,” the revolutionaries warned.

“It proved the callousness and dishonesty of the government,” said some intellectuals.

“This is unfortunate,” said Vaidyanathan sadly.

The next day revolutionaries kidnapped two police constables on duty and killed them.

People cried that the things have come back to square one. Media tried to convince the both sides that small mistakes from any side should not stall the process of peace process.

“The government is ready for talks if the revolutionaries lay down their weapons,” said the Chief Minister.

“That is impossible,” said the revolutionaries.

Once again ... encounters, false encounters, counter killings, land mine blasts, killings of the coverts, bandhs, bus burnings... have become the order of the day.

“The revolutionaries utilized the six months of peace for strengthening their cadre, procuring the automatic weapons, and collecting money. Participating in talks is a part of their long time strategy. Armed struggle is the only solution and we are all aware of that fact,” a police official exhibited some pages of the diary of a revolutionary leader.

“The diary is a proof of the integrity of the revolutionaries,” said the Home Minister.

Some newspapers wrote editorials saying that government is responsible for the failure of talks..

The Chief Minister categorically said, “the government will not keep quiet, if they roam with unlicensed arms and ammunition.”

“If police have weapons, why not the revolutionaries?” questioned a revolutionary poet.

“If the police kill people with weapons, people will have the same right to kill the police,” was the theme of a novel written by a revolutionary novelist.

Encounters are followed by counter killings.... revolutionaries attacking the police stations... police attacking on the revolutionaries’ hideouts...

Government imposed the ban on revolutionaries again.

“It is unfortunate,” said Vaidyanathan.

The story is returned to a square one once again.

“We have already said it so!” some intellectuals were happy for their predictions proved to be right.

18

FUTURE

This war will continue...

Both sides will procure most powerful and deadly destructive weapons. Blasting landmines and claymore mines will be so easy like that of a child play. Mobile phone and Nano technology will reach high standards and operating them from hundreds of miles away will be a possibility.

The warfare techniques may change. But war will continue.

People's organizations try their level best in bringing the two warring groups to the negotiating table. They express their willingness for the talks. Both agree to disagree.

The society gets divided into too many fragments. Lack of unity becomes the common agenda.

In the name of castes, sub castes; religions, religious branches; regions, sub regions; gender, sub genders;... so many fragments will be fighting for their own rights and existence.

People forget about the classless society and selfishness pervades in every spectrum.

Unity in diversity is replaced by diversified unions. People run crazy after money. Earning money becomes one and only goal.

Consumerism overpowers all. Cars, palatial buildings, air conditioned rooms, colour television sets, DVD players, internet... and the things connected to them become essential commodities. House wives become addicted to TV serials. Molecular transformation shapes the middle class people to forget all about the poorer sections.

Globalization, liberalization, privatization reach the mammoth proportions. Poets as usual write poetry expressing their justifiable righteous indignation at the deteriorating values. Education and health completely will be under the control of the private sector.

The youth become busy with internets, chatting rooms, porno films and migrating to America. Magazines and televisions show the advertisements exhibiting women's body in all possible angles.

Sex before marriage becomes routine. Divorces become casual. Marriage will be optional. Unmarried mothers, and teenaged mothers increase in their numbers.

American domination reaches all time high. UNO becomes impotent. Islamic terrorism intrudes every sphere. Tallest buildings get destroyed.

People's belief in God and devil increases enormously. Demigods, Babas, Yogis, and false prophets become popular and earn huge amounts of gold and cash from the ignorance of the people.

In the stampede at the temples people die in thousands.

Farmers commit suicide in record numbers. Agriculture also goes into the hands of corporate sector. Small farmers migrate to towns and become labourers. Caste based occupations die a natural death.

Reservations continue infinitely. People of all castes demand the reservations in any one of the categories.

Pollution becomes more profound. Cars and vehicles multiply in numbers. Roads become congested. People die in lakhs in accidents. Trains collide because of callousness of authorities. AIDS becomes national disease for many nations.

Democracy continues in the same way. Money and muscle power dictate the results of the elections. No political party gets clear majority. Coalition governments begin to rule the Island. Every small party may get a chance to become the ruling party at any point of time. Political renegades jump from one party to the other. They earn crores of rupees in return. Intellectuals cry hoarse. People like Vaidyanathan continue their ceaseless efforts. But their efforts are quite minimal of eating food in the wool blanket and cursing the hair coming into the mouth.

People go to polling booths to vote. Majority believe in this type of society. They concentrate on the concessions they get by its stability. They strengthen it by supporting it.

Stock market index stretches towards the sky and one day suddenly touches all time low. Booms and depressions follow one another.

All values in the society disappear without a trace.

And this so called strong society gets smashed to the ground.

Third world war strikes the world and all this hightech civilization will completely be reduced to ashes.

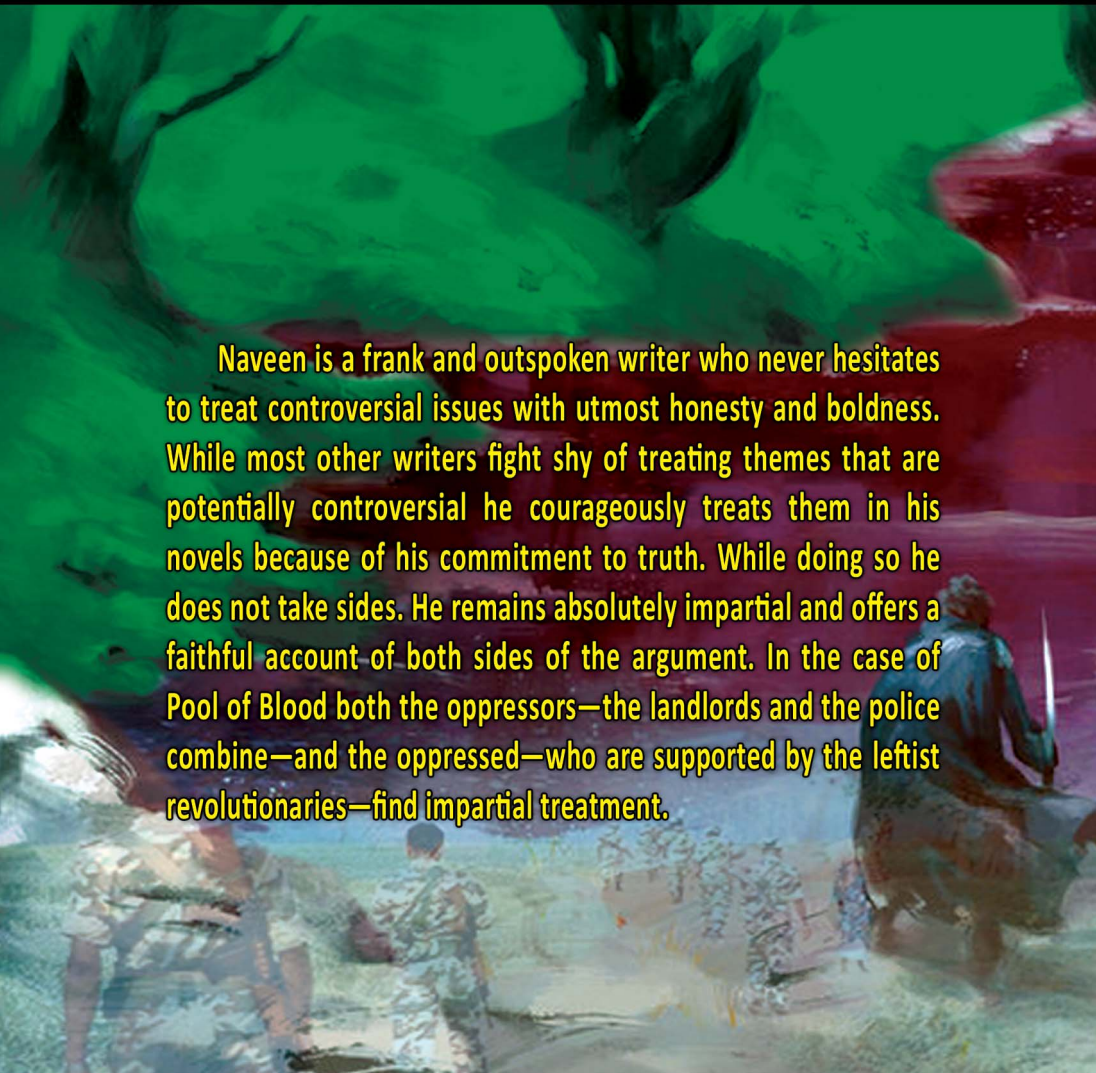
Then from those ashes a new society rises to life. That society gives birth to a selfless, socialist human being.

He builds a new world. That might be the world which Plato very much dreamt of.... Karl Marx dreamt of.... Or may be some one else dreamt of....



Pool of Blood

(Rakta kasaram)



Naveen is a frank and outspoken writer who never hesitates to treat controversial issues with utmost honesty and boldness. While most other writers fight shy of treating themes that are potentially controversial he courageously treats them in his novels because of his commitment to truth. While doing so he does not take sides. He remains absolutely impartial and offers a faithful account of both sides of the argument. In the case of *Pool of Blood* both the oppressors—the landlords and the police combine—and the oppressed—who are supported by the leftist revolutionaries—find impartial treatment.

AMPASAYYA NAVEEN

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