

Role of Women in Srikakulam Tribal Movement

Dr. Priyanka Gangarapu

Abstract: Andhra Pradesh is noted for women's role in the Srikakulam tribal movement (1957-75) against oppression and exploitation by the landlords and traders of plain areas. In the Srikakulam tribal struggles, the participation of women was remarkable. Women played various inspiring roles in this movement very courageously, not hesitating even to sacrifice their lives. Women died in police firing and attacks at different times. Ms.Panchadi Nirmala was killed in police encounter. Ms. Biddika Chandamma was killed by police along with her six months baby (Sivarami Reddy). Ms.Chowadari Sampooramma, Ms. Boopathi Varalakshmi, Ms.Saantamma and other women went to jail and many faced physical harassments from police. Women also contributed their jewellery to fund this movement, like Ms.Panchadi Nirmala, Ms.Chowdari Sampooramma, Ms.Ramanamma Ms., Jayamma, Ms.Paaramma, Ms.Saraswati and Ms.Chandamma (Sivarami Reddy (2006), P.307).After this movement subsided around 1975, women leaders joined NGOs, left parties and other political parties, while the tribal women mainly remained with left parties. The region of Srikakulam had been a base for several people's movements. The events before 1950, as a background to set the context for understanding women's role in politics in Srikakulam after its formation as a district in 1950.

Keywords: women, Tribal movement, women role, srikakulam tribale struggle

1. Introduction

Andhra Pradesh is noted for women's role in the Srikakulam tribal movement (1957-75) against oppression and exploitation by the landlords and traders of plain areas. In the Srikakulam tribal struggles, the participation of women was remarkable. Women played various inspiring roles in this movement very courageously, not hesitating even to sacrifice their lives. Women died in police firing and attacks at different times. Ms.Panchadi Nirmala was killed in police encounter. Ms. Biddika Chandamma was killed by police along with her six months baby (Sivarami Reddy). Ms.Chowadari Sampooramma, Ms.Boopathi Varalakshmi, Ms.Saantamma and other women went to jail and many faced physical harassments from police. Women also contributed their jewellery to fund this movement, like Ms.Panchadi Nirmala, Ms.Chowdari Sampooramma, Ms.Ramanamma Ms., Jayamma, Ms.Paaramma, Ms.Saraswati and Ms.Chandamma (Sivarami Reddy (2006), P.307).After this movement subsided around 1975, women leaders joined NGOs, left parties and other political parties, while the tribal women mainly remained with left parties.

The region of Srikakulam had been a base for several people's movements. The events before 1950, as a background to set the context for understanding women's role in politics in Srikakulam after its formation as a district in 1950.

Statement of the problem: This is the micro level study. This study will explore about role of women in srikakulam tribal movement. Many Women played prominent role in this movement but some women not focused as leaders due to their family background. So this study want know what is the main reasons of above these issue.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the background srikakulam tribal movement.
- To survey the role of women in Srikakulam tribal movement.

- To investigate why all women get same focus in this movement.

2. Methodology

This study depends on secondary and primary data also. This data gathered from published book and un -published thesis and also gathered from interviews with open ended questionnaire from whoever participated in Srikakulam tribal movement. It presents as narration and descriptive method.

Srikakulam Tribal Movement (1958-75): The Srikakulam region was under typical feudalism. The lands of the tribes in the agency areas were under the land lords' control. The wages for rural agriculture laborers and tribes was very low. The conditions of life were harsh and the poor had to struggle for even bare necessities like drinking water. Additionally the Land lords, Moneylenders, Traders, Bureaucrats, forest officers and Political persons- usually from similar class background- harassed the poor and treated them cruelly. Around 1957 the educated middle class youth specially some of the teachers of the region namely Mr.Vempatapu Satyam, Mr. Adibatla Kailasam, Mr. Subbarao Panigrahi, Mr. Tamada Ganapathi, Mr. Panchadi Krishna Murty, Mr. Chowdari Tejeswara Rao, Mr. Biragi Naidu, Mr. Govinda Rao, Mr. Nagabushanam Patnaik, Mr. Kaanu Sanyal, initiated campaigns for changing the situations. This gradually emerged into a long drawn movement, now referred to as the Srikakulam Tribal Movement in its later phase as nuxalite Movement. Struggles and agitations got underway in the rural and agency areas. The poor agriculture labor of rural areas and the tribe's folk of agency areas launched many struggles against the oppression and exploitation by the rich land lords and business classes. Analysts divided the movement into three phases. (There is controversy regarding the exact periodisation of the different phases of the movement.)1) The phase of the struggle from 1957-67 was in the nature of social and economic reforms against feudal landlords following a strategy of show of strength through methods such as seizure of crops, occupation of banjar lands, organizing strikes and struggles for reoccupation of their

alienated lands and raising of wage rates. 2) The phase of the struggle from 1968-69 saw its transformation to something akin to communist revolutions with the particularistic features of armed struggle, guerilla warfare and annihilation program. 3) From this juncture it is noted as part of Nuxalite movement under the leadership of people's war Group The phase of struggle from 1969-71 was an armed revolt with the specific use of violence and meeting the armed military and Para-military force with armed guerilla warfare. Mr. Siva Rami Reddy and Mrs. Venkata Rtnam have reported on the struggle of the agricultural workers during the period from 1968-73(Sivarami Reddy P.4, Venkata Ratnam, P. 178).

Women have played an important role in all the three phases of these struggles. Many women came forward and learnt stick fights¹ (Karra samu in local dialect), and how to take part in guerilla operations. They climbed hills by foot and addressed public meetings in villages. Many of them were arrested and sent to jail several times. They sacrificed their comfortable life for these struggles and even gave away their jewelry as contributions to the Srikakulam tribal movement. The following describes about some of the women who fought in these struggles valiantly. All these women served as leaders in various struggles. They with other local activists decided to form a women's wing of the Srikakulam tribal movement. So throughout 1965-66, they arranged in several villages exclusive meetings for women. They mobilized and gathered women in large numbers for these meetings. Finally in 1966 they conducted a conference at Boddapadu in which they formed the Women's Wing of the tribal movement. In this, Mrs. Chowdari Sampooramma, Mrs. Chapara Kamalamama, Mrs. Duppara Savitri, Mrs. Saraswathi, Mrs. Panchadi Nirmala, Mrs. Paramma and Mrs. Digumarthi Kamalamama participated and took leadership.

Mrs. Panchadi Nirmala, Mrs. Chowdari Sampooramma, Mrs. Ramanamma, Mrs. Jayamma, Mrs. Paramma, Mrs. Saraswathi and Mrs. Chandrama donated their jewelry for this movement (Sivarami Reddy P. 94)

In 1968 in Boddapadu village ten women underwent guerilla training on equal basis with men. In 1968 Panchadi Nirmala got insulted by landlord Mr. Kamesh for which all women fought against Mr. Kamesh who belonged to the big land lord family of Boddapadu area. He was very arrogant, exploited poor people and sexually harassed the poor women (Sivarami Reddy P.376)

Mrs. Panchadi Nirmala: Mrs. Nirmala was born to a poor peasant in Kavali village. She was married to her cousin Mr. Panchadi Krishnamurthy in a social marriage with blessing of family and communist party leaders. He was an activist in the Srikakulam tribal movement. After marriage, she plunged into the Srikakulam tribal movement along with her husband and led the women's wing. She contributed her jewelry for the Srikakulam tribal movement. She also had to leave her two children (daughter and son) with her mother to pursue her role in movement. Ultimately on 22-12-1969, she faced death in a police encounter. (Siva Ramiraeddy P.311); Interviews with Mrs. Panchadi Roja,(daughter of Mrs. Panchadi Nirmala), Mrs. Sampooramma, and Mr. Tejeswara Rao who were activists in that movement)

Mrs. Gorakala Ankamma: Mrs. Ankamma belonged to Rajam village of Tekkali Taluk. When the peoples' organization, popularly known as 'Sangham' was formed, she joined it and participated actively throughout in the Srikakulam Tribal Movement agitations. She was an expert in organizing communist party people's units. When police raided her village, she went to the neighboring villages and continued her activities. There also she would organize the tribal agricultural workers. (Sivarami Reddy P.312) She too faced death in the encounter on 22-12-1969.

Mrs. Telukala Saraswathi: Mrs. Saraswathi was one of the members who participated in the Srikakulam tribal movement from Boddapadu village. She had lost her parents at a very young age and was very poor. When the Sangham was formed in her village she became an active member of the campaign team. She travelled along with publicity team of Srikakulam tribal movement, which started from Boddapadu on 24-11- 1968. She was killed in a police clash. (Sivarami Reddy P.312).

Mrs. Paila Chandramma: From the beginning of the formation of the Sangam Mrs. Chandramma was actively involved in organizing women in the tribal area of Boddapadu. She mobilized women for meetings, strikes, and campaigns and addressed them very effectively. Several times she was beaten up by the police, arrested and jailed. She was forced to go into hiding. (Sivarami Reddy Pp.372-73, 376-77) She organized the local tribal women's committees of Communist Party. She educated and made women in agency areas aware and encouraged them to successfully participate in rallies, meetings and conferences. She always focused on peoples issues and stood as support to women. Mrs. Chandramma is an inspiration to many women cadre of today also. She is a role model. To this day she is associated with the activities of the women's organisation affiliated to the CPI (ML).

Mrs. Paramma: Mrs. Paramma was born in Boddapadu village into a poor peasant family. She worked in the agricultural fields despite having a deformity of the hand due to polio. She joined the Sangam and worked in it. She grew food grains, cooked food and supplied food to all the leaders of the Srikakulam Tribal movement. She participated actively in the guerilla warfare and was also subjected to police oppression, due to which she had to stay underground for some time. While she was in hiding she suffered hunger for several days. During this period she travelled alone on foot to Uddanam, through the hills and forests, enduring the severe climate and hardships enroute. Even during this journey to Uddanam, she would get involved with the issues of the people. She worked to resolve issues like drinking water, minimum support price for cashew workers and land for the landless people.

Towards the end, she started working for the People's War Group Party and became the team commander in the party. After serving for 30 years for the revolutionary movement, she was killed in an encounter on 3-4-1998 (Sivarami Reddy P.373) Details about Mrs. Bhoopathi Varalakshmi and Mrs. Chowdari Sampooramma are narrated under the detailed case studies in section II of this chapter

The women who participated in this Srikakulam Tribal movement entered the revolutionary path through the men in their families. For example Mrs. Chowdari Sampooramma is Wife of Mr. Chowdari Tejeswara Rao; Mrs. Panchadi Nirmala is Wife of Mr. Panchadi Krishnamurthy; Mrs. Lachamma is Wife of Mr. Mavidappala Soori; Mrs. Varahalu is Wife of Mr. Duppala Krishnamurthy; Mrs. Savitri is Wife of Mr. Govinda Rao; Mrs. Rama Sita is Wife of Mrs. M.V. Ramana Murrty; Mrs. Saantamma is Wife of Mrs. Vempatapu Satyam; And Mrs. Laxmi is Daughter of Kilasam (Sivarami Reddy Pp.576-77). But it is noted that though they were initiated into the movement and activities under the influence of the men folk of their families, they later participated and worked in a very personally committed manner and evolved as important activists as a result of their own efforts.

3. Conclusion

In spite of these women's participation in this remarkable historical movement their roles were molded and limited as extensions of their family male members who were Revolutionary activists and leaders of the movement. These women hardly had any opportunity to exercise actual leadership and decision making.

Moreover women activists from very backward socio, economic background, like Paramma, Anakamma, Saraswatamma and Varalaxmi did not even get due recognition for their role and sacrifices.

References

- [1] Interview gathered from Sampooramma Chowdari. Tejeswara Rao Chowdari.(Tribal Movement Activists)
- [2] Sivarami Reddy,B.,(2006), "*Mahattara Srikakula Poratam: charitrika pariseelana*", Prajasakthi Book House, Hyderabad.
- [3] Venkataratnam Tripurana (1988), *Tribal peasant Struggle of Srikakulam (1950-75)*, (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis) submitted to Andhra University, Visakhapatnam.
- [4] Interview gathered from Varalaxmi B. (Tribal Movement Activist)