# THE TURBULENT AND DECADENT PERIOD OF REVOLUTIONARY POETRY IN THE COMBINED ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA; AN INSIGHTFUL CRITICAL REVIEW

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**Abstract:** It is to present an over view of socio-political-poetic movement which reached the pinnacle, but crumbled to the earth. It was Henry James who commented that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little purpose serving literature. The same holds true of the protest literature in Telugu. Since the early nineties a great deal of remarkable progressive and revolutionary literature has been written in Telugu by writers ranging from Gurajada Appa Rao to the avowed leftists like Sree Sree. The combined Andhra Pradesh witnessed a turbulent Revolutionary Movement from 1960s. It was both a practical and a literary movement to enthuse people, to come out from their confinements and to assert their rights. Though there was a political angle, the literary perspective engulfed the former. Especially the poets of that moment, duly responded and produced meritorious revolutionary poetry to ignite fire in the third estate people, middle-class, who were angry with social inequality and injustice, which forced them to fight a revolution to bring equality, liberty, and fraternity. The poets and writers felt if peaceful ways don't work, violent ways do work. The men and women of letters went a step ahead to advocate for civil liberties. Deeply critical of the government, themes of police brutality, caste based oppression, anti-establishment and influences of Marxism penetrated their writings.

Terminology: inequality, injustice, parliamentary, Naxalbary, fraternity, revisionism, armed struggle.

There were two reasons for the origin of the Revolutionary Writers' Association, *Virasam*. One of the two is the emergence of Naxalbary Movement, with the influence of international and national political and social developments and the other is, ignoring of the Maoist ideology by the Progressive Writers' Association, *Arasam*. At that very moment, because of the impact of the Revisionism in Russia, the Communists in India decided to choose the parliamentary course bring forth equality in the society. However, some radical forces within the Communists in India were quite unwilling to accept parliamentary way. They assembled and after due deliberation, they determined to picked out the extreme course of armed struggle.

Naxalism started in a village named Naxalbary in the West Bengal in the year 1967 and it was led by Charu Mazumdar of CPM party under whose leadership the armed peasants of the village occupied the landholdings of the landlords. Staunch support to the movement was extended by both the intellectual and student communities who had a radical bent of mind. Especially the students of Calcutta University were inspired by the movement. The revolutionary movement which started in the West Bengal acquired ability to inspire the oppressed parts of the country.

The branch that supported the armed struggle, having separated itself from the Marxist Communist Party, named itself after Marx and Lenin and assumed the name Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist). It continued its struggle and extended complete support to the revolutionists like Naxals. But astonishingly it lost the ground within three years in the very place where it had originated. But circumstantially it had gained a firm ground in some other parts like Srikakulam and Telangana in Andhra Pradesh.

The Communist Party of India (ML) on the birthday of Lenin, made a proclamation that its first aim was to grab political power in the State and later at the National level. It was resolved that the party should grab land from the landlords and distribute it among the landless peasants. That means they thought and believed that it would bring about revolution in the agrarian sector. The party also convinced the activists that the dream of taking hold of the power of the State would become true only with the success of a long drawn out armed peasant struggle in which the people at the lower rung should also actively participate. B. Sivarami Reddy comments, 'In the historical Marxist Leninist party meeting which was convened in Calcutta in 1970, there were good numbers of representatives from Andhra. The armed struggle that had originated at a hamlet in Bengal spread like a wild fire to the states like Bihar, Madhyapradesh, Kerala, Panjab etc., and the poor, the betrayed, the down trodden and the disappointed had identified themselves with the movement.'

The armed struggle of Parvathipuram Agency in Srikakulam soon changed its course and adopted the guerrilla tactics of war. So, the government declared the places of armed struggle as troublesome and unmanageable regions and took effective steps to stamp out the movement. Yet the movement survived and spread to the districts like Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal and the Northern Telangana region. Along with the peasants, it was the Communist party that had carried out an armed struggle against the Nizam rule in Telangana. But after the police action (Operation Polo) in September 1948 on Nizam, those who were reluctant to give up their arms opted out to join hands with naxalites. The desperate young people also started working hand in glove with the naxalites. The only aim of those revolutionaries was to destroy, by force, the parliamentary system of government and take reins into their hands. They adhered themselves to the theory: 'power flows through the barrel of the gun.'

The revolutionaries believed firmly that a people's government would be possible through long drawn armed struggle and because of that belief they followed the philosophy of Mao Tsetung. The rapid changes in the political and social sectors had their deep impact on the ways of thinking of the contemporary writers and poets who were aware of the happenings around and they duly responded poetically. Their responses, in favour of insurrectionism brought about a sea change in Telugu literature, especially in poetry. The armed struggles paved a way to the revolutionary poetry which played a major role in bringing the Maoist commitment back into force. The revolutionary movements, the peasant struggles and the evolution of the revolutionary poetry in free verse strengthened the revolutionary ideas among the middle and below middle class people who extended their support that furthered the revolutionary struggle from the stand point of Marxist - Leninist and Maoist ideologies.

The revolutionary developments between the years 1966 and 1970 had greatly inspired the entire gamut of the Telugu poets, writers and artistes who had progressive bent of mind. A series of changes precipitated a situation in which all these revolutionary forces converged into action in a big way. A wave of revolutionary thought had been seen swaying the Telugu literary firmament. A lot of powerful poetry, which not only supported the revolutionary ideas but also propagated them, emerged during this period. In this connection Tripuraneni Srinivas explains how a poem gets birth and how it can be made a weapon. His poem says that poetry is not only for the smiling but also for the wailing. Another noteworthy thing was, the socio-economic conditions of that time brought forth the necessity of putting the literary and cultural work on the right, effective and result oriented track and carry it forward in a perfectly organized fashion. As a result, some people thought of infusing life into the

Progressive Writers' Association that had lost its vim and vigour and in fact it was no longer fit to undergo a revolutionary transformation.

Consequently, the erstwhile people's cultural movements had consolidated and transfigured themselves into the revolutionary cultural movement. This transmutation had set itself a niche and direction to revolution. The members of the revolutionary clan galvanized the revolutionary spirit into a poetic activity, a powerful media to drive the revolutionary thoughts home. Papineni Siva Sankar writes that poetry became a burning cinder. More importantly, the revolutionary poet embraced the fire and the poetry of fury. The *Virasam* poets also declared that they would never play the role of mere spectators but would be abreast of thought and movement and in the midst of the times by playing an active part in the social conflicts and people's struggles. Having been conditioned by their ends, the revolutionary poets favoured a simple vocabulary, lucid syntax and clear images and even folk tunes to suit their purposes. Poets who were committed to free verse retained their identity and continued with their experiment.

In Andhra Pradesh, favourable conditions had been prevailing for the formation of revolution. In course of time, probability turned into possibility and a way was paved for the establishment of the same. Those who earlier had played a prominent role in the progressive movement had got somehow disgusted with the revisionist politics and took up the path of the revolutionary literature. Meanwhile, a second generation of the poets, writers and artistes with revolutionary zeal had emerged on the scene. Those forces which were engaged in creative revolutionary activities were in a considerable number to take the movement forward with their revolutionary fervour. The revolutionary poetry worked for the wide spread of the revolutionary struggle, Marxism - Leninism and Maoist ideology. The bubbling new enthusiasm of the young writers, poets and artistes who were totally identified themselves with the revolutionary ideology had extended the much needed support and the much required literary base to the movement.

The youth, along with the erstwhile first generation writers, poets and artistes being on the forefront, had made a great contribution to lay a firm base for the building up of people's literary and cultural movements with the revolution as the whole and sole aim and objective. The younger took a few lessons from their seniors who had rich experience in the past. Thus they started formulating the orientation process of the literary and cultural movement and literary tasks suitable to the development of a new revolution in the country uniting various sections that were attached to it into one single organization. The young men took the movement forward to achieve the sole objective of people's revolution. In the meantime, attempts had been made by a cultural organization namely, Seven Stars' Syndicate, to infuse life into the earlier Progressive Writers' Association which had become stagnant and lost its vitality. That was an impeccable attempt of a liberal progressive group which tried to rope in the star-chip of the old block Sree Sree with them.

They, in fact, made the move under the pretext of honouring Sree Sree at a convention in Hyderabad. Sree Sree also consented to attend it. In this connection what S.V. Satyanarayana, the editor of the progressive literary magazine *Abhyudaya*, recorded in his literary work 'Revolutionary Songs in Telugu' is quite relevant to prove the historicity of the event. He details the historical happening in Hyderabad under the aegis of a cultural organization named Seven Stars' Syndicate. Having understood the real motto behind the effort, the revolutionary forces won over Sree Sree and with great effort and endeavour. So, Sree Sree did not attend the conference of the Seven Stars' Syndicate. Consequently the revolutionary literary movement was placed on the right track. In that process and in the light of the revolutionary politics of the day, the cultural and literary movement forged ahead with vigour and fervour to achieve the objective of reaching the revolutionary movement to the level of the common man who was at the bottom rung.

Certain amateurish revolutionary minds saw the movement from a romantic angle on one hand and those who had already been under the influence of the Left adventurist trend took the initiative to make preparations for the formation of a novel literary organization for they had already been inspired by the ongoing armed struggle. Consequently, under the chairmanship of the charismatic personality and legendary poet Sree Sree, was formed the Revolutionary Writers' Association, or Virasam in Hyderabad on 4th July 1970 which remained a red letter day in the history of Modern Telugu Poetry. Poets like K.V. Ramana Reddy, Jwalamukhi etc., were with Sree Sree on that day. The manifesto of the Association was also released on the very day and it proclaimed its philosophy, policy and the direction of its activities. It also passed a resolution that the poetry should be used as a powerful weapon and its crusade would be towards the comprehensive individual liberty and equality besides, it would shout aloud for the universal humanism which, they thought, would be possible only through Marxist-Leninist ideology.

There were truth filled gloomy canvases painted by several poets about the menacing issues that were chronically eating into the vitals of the socio-economic fabric of the society. Some more voices brimming with an ardent hope for a better tomorrow were heard. For instance, Desetti Kesava Rao, whose poem appeared in Chandrabhaga, a journal of Indian Writing in English Poetry Chronicle, writes with a warning to the exploiters. It was reckoned that the way of *Virasam* was not just a footpath but a highway on which more and more poets could tread upon. *Virasam* cherished unity-struggle-unity i.e., unity and struggle should help one another. Nevertheless, it hardly functioned as a mass based organization as the membership was limited but it worked harmoniously with those who were committed to Marxism-Leninism and Maoist thought. There was an impression that *Virasam* was a kind of Revolutionary Communist Writers' Association too.

The Association befriended and assimilated those who were democratic in thought and radical in mind. *Virasam* followed neither 'closed-doorism' nor 'open-doorism'. So to say it welcomed 'joint forum and joint actions' and briefly its aim was unity in principle. Some of the revolutionary poets even participated in the armed struggle. It shows their out and out identification with the movement in letter and spirit. *Virasam's* ideology had to be more practical and pragmatic. Action was more important than mere theoretical rhetoric. Without any qualm, their doctrine proclaimed that the members of the movement should remain abreast of the thought and movement and only then literature would become an effective instrument for the downtrodden. A galaxy of revolutionary poets kindled other revolutionaries and even some of them directly participated in the struggle.

Sree Sree is the towering personality in almost all the movements in Telugu. He brought out some of his revolutionary propagandist verses which were meant more to be recited than to be read, as there was wonderful word music in them. Jhanjha, an anthology of verses was fused with revolutionary fervour written and published by *Virasam*. Number of verses was written in memory of Subba Rao Panigrahi who had lost his life in Srikakulam armed struggle. Thus poetry was used for the revolutionary purpose and also was also used as a weapon to fight against the gross economic and social injustice. Sree Sree's Maroprasthanam, the second march to a new world, was brought out. But there was a comment that it had less vim and vigour than that of his magnum opus, Mahaprasthanam.

Nagnamuni's 'Wooden Horse,' written in 1977, became an instant success. The poem is packed with anger and agony at the inactiveness of the entire mechanism of the government. The poet openly and apparently expresses his dissatisfaction and deplores the relief measures taken up by the administration in the cyclone affected Diviseema area. He felt that there was a lot of insensitivity and inaction in the relief and rehabilitation measures of the establishment. Nagnamuni came down heavily on the inefficient government. He maintained that the horse in flesh and blood is a sign of speed, faith, victory and strength too. But the wooden horse was a symbol of stagnation, stupidity and hypocrisy. The poet commented that depending on the government was one and the same as depending on the wooden horse for mobility. Thus Nagnamuni exposed the non-functioning nature of the establishment in a metaphorical style.

K.V. Ramana Reddy, who worked as the secretary of *Virasam*, produced a collection of poems while he was in the jail during emergency. His poems stand as testimony to freedom of love, praise, irony, satire and sorrow. In his opinion, no matter whatever kind of life one chooses, one can forge ahead and for this one needs freedom. He felt that life is not to hoard and rest on laurels but to try and travel. Though Kaloji had revolutionary leanings, he did not contribute to any specific political ideology. He was always sympathetic with radical and leftist social philosophers. His is a singularly mighty voice in one sense. Vegunta Mohan Prasad comments that Kaloji was influenced by the great individualists like Rousseau, a French philosopher and writer and who supported the French Revolution; Voltaire, a French writer who was the embodiment of 18th century enlightenment and Victor Hugo, a French poet and novelist.

Though Kaloji received the second highest honour of the country, Padmabhushan, he never sided with the establishment against his principles. He is also called a great poet of democracy. His poetry is sprinkled with the Telangana dialect unlike that of other famous Telangana poets like Dasaradhi and Cinare. The lines below define his ideal citizen as one who realizes not only his rights and privileges but also his bounden duties and responsibilities towards the society at last. Kaloji opines that duty sans freedom stands for slavery. Freedom coupled with duty makes freedom secure. K. G. Satya Murthy popularly known as Sivudu, is one of the major poets in *Virasam*. In fact, it is he who gave a direction to the movement in the way it had to proceed, it is said. He has directed the poets of *Virasam* to adopt the technique of lyrical writing (folk song) so as to be able to reach the uneducated masses and to spread revolutionary ideas.

K.Siva Reddy is not a member of *Virasam*. But he responded positively to their ideology. He has written poems on the aspects like exploitation. His 'Hospital Piece' was surcharged with revolutionary thoughts. He also wrote 'The Bloody Sun.' what moved him more, it seems, was the woeful and deplorable mess and the merciless victimization of the patients who were exploited and had to undergo every humiliation there. Siva Reddy gives a life like description of a scene that can be found in any government hospital. The hospitals deny blood, medicine and even care to the voiceless and the poverty stricken while buying blood from the rickshaw pullers and the miserable mothers who sell it for just twenty rupees to feed their hungry kids. Siva Reddy comments that people have Utopian (usually impractical) kind of socialism where there are Industrial revolutions, Green revolutions and colourful charts showing the improvements of people in wealth, health and other things. He warns that the bloodshot red eyes will revolt someday like the tidal waves and then nobody would be able to stop them.

Gunturu Seshendra Sarma, the founder of Kavi Sena, is a unique poet as he is a traditionalist in maintaining the poetic quality of his works, a radical in thought and a post-modernist in expression. He was moved by the plight of the peasants of the day and responded poetically and that can be found in the 'My Country - My People.' In the vast and wide realm of the modern Telugu poetry, Seshendra's is entirely a unique style that carved out for him a unique niche. On the ambitions and aspirations he cherishes so fondly and also equally about the future of the woman of India, he expenses 'Which yarn which dreams of colours, I weave saris to drape women of my country and release them like butterflies in the meadows of human life.' Seshendra reveals the deeper, further intense feelings of his heart. He transfigures his visions for the future of his beloved country effectively. He wishes to build walls that not only protect the frontiers of the country but also create terror in the hearts of the enemies. It is the feeling of an individual as well as that of the nation.

Varavara Rao has been a propagandistic and is emotionally very much involved in the *Virasam's* ideology. He worked as the editor of his own journal Srujana and produced anthologies like Sisirosassu, Jeevanadi and Swetcha. He is still a member in *Virasam*. He, in his poem 'Cross Roads,' gave an open call for armed revolution. It is because he believed that there was no true freedom and justice for the lower rung of the people. Varavara Rao felt that the government has declared that there is no slavery as it has been abolished. But he holds that slavery is everywhere as people are under the oppressive rule. He wonders how true freedom can be enjoyed while hearing

the sounds of the steel boots of the policemen. He reprimands that the present system of ruling and laws are making the common people mere cowards and impotents.

Gaddar is an avowed advocate of mass upsurge. He has more songs than poetry. They are meant to be sung but not to be read. The songs have two dimensions; the first teaches the Revolutionary ideology and the other enlightens the Marxist philosophy. Through his spontaneous rhythmic songs in a folklore style and dance he can stir the hearts of people with. He always has a soft corner for those who are in the Revolutionary movement.

There was another anthology, 'March' and the specialty of it was, there were poems without the names of the poets and P. Kishan Rao was the editor. Having been inspired by the anthology, there came another collection of poems named 'Get Up,' with almost no poetic quality but full of revolutionary spirit. Journals such as Srujana, Prabhanjanam, Arunatara, Jeevanaadi, Pilupu, Vidyullata became powerful instruments to propagate revolutionary ideas. Besides, associations like Jananatymandali and Arunodaya extended their all out support to *Virasam*. Free verse became the favourite of the middle class people and lyrical poetry breathed life into the revolutionary movements.

The reality in the revolutionary poetry and its proximity to the situations caught the vein of the common man and intellectual as well. The committed followers of Virasam spread the revolutionary poetry and ideas to the nooks and corners of the state. Here it is found that poetry, composed on true occurrences and situations has drawn the attention of the society. To show that it is a universal occurrence, Wordsworth can be quoted. He, in the preface to his Lyrical Ballads, announces, The principal object proposed in the poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to associate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination.'

It is apparent that while the progressive poetry was receding and the revolutionary conditions were stirring up politics, there came on the scene the Revolutionary Writers' Association. But with the passage of time, the attitudes of the writers and the policies adopted by the association had become a point of debate. And this might be reckoned as the second phase of *Virasam*. This debate had resulted in bringing about several changes in the functioning and even in the contribution of the association to the society. Marxian socialism had been the main characteristic feature of the Revolutionary Writers' Association. But in the long run, the term Marxism was given different definitions. That is to say that the Marxist philosophy got diluted. Though the term continued to keep its superficial ideological relevance, it ceased to inspire the true spirit of Marxist ideology. It was commented that the very Marxist spirit became stale and staid.

It was, of course, true that Marxism had proved itself, in the beginning, as the most modern, scientific and revolutionary ideology-based. That's why *Virasam* could rein the Telugu literary world for a considerable period of time. Later self-centered people along with politics entered the association. Owing to these developments many eminent and committed revolutionary poets left *Virasam*. As a bolt from the blue there came the suspension of Sree Sree which was followed by his resignation letter to the chairmanship and to the membership of the Revolutionary Writers' Association, just like a father relinquishing his status as a father.

But on 23rd July 1980 Sree Sree withdrew his resignation letter and remained as a member of *Virasam* till he breathed his last. But here lies an unforgettable development. Three years before his resignation, Sree Sree wrote a letter to K.V. Ramana Reddy, the then secretary of the association on the 7th August 1977. In that letter he expressed that *Virasam* was giving more than required prominence to politics. Here are Sri Sri's own words, The naked and undeniable truth is that *Virasam* has given so much importance to politics that it is not supposed to give. It ignored the immediate literary tasks that it alone could perform. Or otherwise, there would have been the origination of the All India Revolutionary Writers' Association. Look, what has happened now? The Revolutionary writers in Andhra Pradesh have been scattered.' This incident can be considered as the beginning of the sliding down decadence of the organization. Some of the key personalities, who could no longer bear to see the

downfall, either went underground or marched into jungles. But in course of time among the remaining revolutionary writers, some ideological differences cropped up and *Virasam* split into several splinter groups. As a result, the activities and the production of literature of the Revolutionary Writers' Association decreased to a dismal level.

Drawing inspiration from Subba Rao Panigrahi, whose Jamukula Kathalu (a way of singing songs while playing a stringed musical instrument) were very famous in those days, *Virasam* and with the initiation taken by the Art Lovers of Hyderabad, Jananatyamandali was formed. Folk art forms had been tried to be revived for revolutionary purpose. The bards took up this novel way to drive their revolutionary ideas home easily and effectively to the masses. In this concern Mao himself exhorted, 'We should take over the rich legacy and the good traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages, but the aim must still be to serve the masses of the people. Nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands those old forms be remolded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people.' Neverthless, the impact of these art forms was just meager.

Writers like Varavara Rao and Cherabanda Raju were arrested in Warangal while they were attending a convention. There entered Gaddar, who is believed to be an avowed advocate of mass upsurge and a master in composing and reciting politically provocative songs and took up the reigns of Jananatyamandali. He intensified its activities and his name became synonymous with the organization. It's evident that *Virasam's* inclination towards politics had been the main reason for its gradual recession from view. Due to difference of opinions, particularly on politics, some more poets and writers separated themselves from *Virasam*. Apart from these, there had been several other factors like the new 'isms' which cropped up on account of the rapid changes occurring in the texture and structure of the social and political scenarios. Besides, the death of Mao Tse Tung in 1976 was a mortal blow to naxalism which weakened *Virasam* further.

There was another blow which made *Virasam* lose its ground still further. Feminists and Dalits pointed out that the association in its over-enthusiasm in achieving its objective, revolution, paid no attention to certain oppressed sections like women and Dalits. It was a naked truth and couldn't be denied. The members of *Virasam* had felt that if feminism was given importance, it might become a parallel force with its own ideology which might run against that of *Virasam*. In addition to this, *Virasam* was looking at the society from the class point of view but not that of the caste. Prakasa Rao maintains that the feminists and Dalits questioned its attitude and commitment towards them and no explanation could convince them. Referring to the attitudes adopted by it towards the questions like Feminism and Dalitism, the leadership of *Virasam* clearly stated, ' The feminists have made effective attempts for theorization of feminism as a competitor and alternative to Marxism. At theoretical level, the things said by feminism are different from and opposed to historical materialism.' The feminists and the Dalits further complained that the poets and writers of *Virasam* miserably failed at least in taking up their cause and feeling concerned about them. And no exclusive literature was produced focusing their problems specifically. As a result, the sections which felt neglected strained themselves away from the main stream of the movement. They also had a standing complaint that Marxism was neither accommodative nor sensitive enough to look upon their problems as problems at all.

Meanwhile emergency was declared in India and it had its own bearing on *Virasam*. Those revolutionary poets who walked out of *Virasam* during emergency period, did not come back to the organization either because of fear or because of their emotions getting cooled down. It can be said that just like the earlier Progressive Writers' Association, which had lost its sway and effect, Revolutionary Writers' Association too lost its power and influence. In the words of Jwalamukhi, who was one of the revolutionary poets, 'The legacy of the progressive poetry came to a fag end. Even the naked poetry, as a bridging force between the progressive and revolutionary literary movements has come to finale. Revolutionary poetry as a topic of mention in the separatist arguments has

lost its relevance. Eventually the militant ambitions, at the social level turning gradually into the desires of revenge at the personal level, are remaining as an orphan baby.'

**Conclusion**: By the year 1980 the Revolutionary Writers' Association completely disappeared. The rise was slow but the fall was fast. During emergency, writers and poets who were against the establishment were sent to jail. Some poets wrote from the jail, but it was powerless and insipid. K.V. Ramana Reddy wrote that the Emergency period turned out to be a blow to the rule of law, to constitutional proprieties, to human rights and to the integrity of millions, even foreigners observed the changing scenario in India. In the 'Voices of Emergency' David Selbourne records his reflections. He went the extent of comparing the Emergency in Italy to that of India. He accused that even the courts were helpless in saving the rights of common man. He holds, 'It was not just in Mussolini's Italy that the trains ran on time; they ran on time in India also. Yet detaining over a hundred thousand, without trial, abolishing habeas corpus, beating the soles of some detainees with bamboo canes and forcing others to drink urine is a high price to pay for ensuring that rail service was punctual.' This is the analysis of the turbulent and decadent period of Revolutionary Writers' Association in the land of Telugu. The revolutionary poetry vanished without serving its purpose of bettering the life of common man.

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