

Interview with comrade Murali. Comrade Murali was released from jail recently. He had before jail been Politburo member of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in charge of the South West Regional Buro.

This is an authorized transcript.

After the setback of Naxalbari, Karimnagar and Adilabad the peasant movement was started in Andhra Pradesh by 1978. During this time, the Party decided to organise a "Go to Village Campaign" in 1977. Accordingly, in 1978 in Telangana, Coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, youth and students from Andhra Pradesh Students Union and Radical Youth League along with Party Professionals organised political schools for 10 days in the shape of "Go to Village Campaigns". At the village level, a democratic revolution against feudalism was the agenda and appeals were made to the villagers through pamphlets, posters and rallies. There was a strong contradiction between feudal lords and peasantry in the shape of a class struggle. A perspective was needed for a protracted people's war towards a liberated base.

According to the planning in Dandakaranya (Adilabad, East Godavari and Visakha agency which were earlier all under Dandakaranya, now with the spread of the movement, for the strategic point of view the Adilabad, East Godavari and Vishakha are separated from Dandakaranya) to build liberated zones for which purpose 7 squads went out.

Here after entry of the squads, in Warangal, Khammam and Nizamabad class struggle had intensified along with Karimnagar and Adilabad. Under the squads leadership class struggle developed in Dandakaranya. In 1984 a committee i.e., Forest Liaison Committee was attempted to be made in Dandakaranya for the co-ordination of the movement. In 1987, a state level committee was elected, but due to absence of a central level committee it worked under the Andhra Pradesh state committee. After the formation of present Dandakaranya, I mean in 1995, there is a forest committee called Special Zonal Committee.

In Dandakaranya, the four districts i.e., East, Adilabad, Bastar, Gadchiroli had different situations as in different states there were different levels of exploitation.

1. In Adilabad, in the gond adivasi areas, there were mahajan, who through their usury practices, charged high rates of interest and grabbed peasant land.
2. In Gadchiroli there was not that much exploitation from money lenders, but it came from the forest department. Along side there were other contradictions, but the primary one being the state versus people.
3. In Bastar, there was land problem. Here there was contradiction within the people as well as from the forest department. There was lesser exploitation than Adilabad. Tribals, though they were divided into classes, yet contradictions here were not as sharp as in Telangana plain areas. There was a class society here, but due to the tribal traditions, unlike plains exploitation, the Mukhia/Manjis exploitation was less sharp, the main contradiction thereby being state versus people.

4. Visakha/East Godavari – here both contradictions i.e., landlords versus people and state versus people was perceptible. In terms of the land problem and the contradiction between Mukhia and the people, one may say that the tribal chiefs always use to keep the best lands under their position and the people only had the less fertile land. So in 1987, the Party gave a call for land distribution leading to struggles.

It was in this period that people were being mobilised and state intervention also increased.

Comrade Peddi Shankar was first martyred in Gadchiroli in Moinbinpet, then after the squads attacked and the repression also intensified with people being arrested. There were differences in the levels of preparation in different region, but nonetheless repression was common in the East and Adilabad and somewhat less in Bastar and Gadchiroli and the Party had to advance breathing state repression.

Mass organisations started being built initially there were peasant organisations where women also took part, later separate women organisations were also built for their emancipation. One of the prime issues around which the party mobilised the people was regarding labour rate for tendu leaf collection. In this backward area, the contractors used to pay at a much lesser rate than decided by the government. Against this, 1981 onwards the party started building up large mobilisation. Later, the party also mobilised around the issue of feudalism and the mahajan's exploitation in this area. In this way, the party carried forward the bright history of the struggles of Srikakulam and Naxalbari.

The 1/70 Act that had prohibited non-advasis from buying land in the adivasi area was largely a farce because already by then thousands of acres of land had been acquired by the non-tribal rich peasantry or the landlord. Bitter struggles were led in Adilabad and other areas over this issue of land. It was during this time that forest land of thousands of acres were also being reoccupied under the party's leadership as the class struggle advance.

Repression also was going hand in hand as in 1981 April, the state police mercilessly fired upon the Indravelli meeting where many were martyred. But in spite of repression, the movement advanced progressively. So, in various areas mobilisation and struggle were launched on various different issues like forest land, labour rate for paper mill works, mahajan exploitation and so on.

Till 1985, in many areas the struggle had expanded and therefore the state in order to repress the rising movement made bigger plans to crush it, particularly in Andhra Pradesh in the shape of undeclared war on people. Around the same time, in the Dandakaranya belt I mean Andhra Pradesh part too police repression started leading to great losses in the form of indiscriminate encounters and arrests. But the movement advanced in Dandakaranya breathing this repression.

Specially under the Dandakaranya committee and the Andhra Pradesh committee the movement to seize patta lands intensified in 1991. And as the momentum built around the land issue, repression, torture, elimination of squads was plan in tandem by the state.

(Here the text is corrupt:

The movement advanced and even expanded by 1990 facing all kinds of onslaught by the state and finally the Central Organising Committee. The Central Organizing Committee dissolved, the members ultimately forming the People's War group....was formed.)

Particularly, if you look at the Gadchiroli movement, adivasi people were to be mobilised in vast numbers. This eventually invited hundreds of arrests even of intellectuals by the Maharashtra police. By 1993 the peasant movement and women movement had intensified along with the development of the Party and huge mobs amounting to thousands were being mobilised. Sharad Pawar, the then chief minister, launched a large scale repression to encounter the people. Within one year, 60 members were martyred. Simultaneously, in Bastar too state repression and encounters were on the rise. And eventually, both in AP and Maharashtra repression intensified.

In this context, in East Godavari and Vishakha more than 106 villages were burnt here and atmosphere of white terror was created. At many places, Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee and Andhra Pradesh intellectuals tried to collect funds to help the tribes as well as through sending fact finding teams. N. T. Rama Rao, in spite of coming to power with populist slogans, posing himself as a democrat, and giving Lal Salam to the naxals, after becoming chief minister continued the rampant suppression and terror campaign like the earlier governments.

The movement advanced towards a liberated zone after the party came here and gave calls for people's war. But it was only in 2000, that the decision of building people's war was taken more concretely by the party and since then the developments in guerrilla war had intensified at rural level and the revolution had taken to lead in the correct direction.

The Cchandrapulla Reddy group with which comrade Jan Myrdal had been acquainted in 1980, split into Prajapantha and Janashakti. The later again split into Pratighatana and Prajapatighatana. As of now, some groups of this faction are there here and there. New Democracy turned into a legal party and took the revisionist party line. It had one seat in the Assembly election. At present even that was lost. Janashakti, after the severe repression had suffered losses as well. But thereafter retarded in line.

Prison – Another battle ground for Revolution

The multi-pronged attack of the state has been there to eliminate our strategic leadership and for this purpose the government had taken many plans. Largely their plans has been to use fake encounters. Some of the arrests if they had been in a public area where encounter could not be used for elimination, the drama and court and judiciary was orchestrated. With the complete collusion of both state and centre, the entire judicial machinery and penal provision are in a pathetic condition. Particularly, Maoist prisoners face a lot of repression and torture to the extent of being kept in chains more than 24 hours, or in single cells by court order. The condition is largely similar in Maharashtra, Chattisgad, Andhra. The later however, has relatively better jails and court system while inhuman conditions prevail in the rest. Particularly in Maharashtra, where there are hundreds of jails, squad members, party members, militia as well as state committee members remain behind bars, some for even 3-5 years without trial. Chandrapur, Amaravati, Nagpur and Bombay being the most notorious.

In Chaattisgarh – Raipur, Durg, Jagdalpur and Bilaspur are the most notorious which more than 500 Maoists ranging from Politbureau, Central Committee, Divisional Committe and other comrades in jail. Other than in Andhra Pradesh, where there are some lawyers with pro-people, most lawyers in other states are appendages of the police system only.

In terms of basic facilities, like food and, drink the condition inside jails is pathetic. To keep psychological pressure, they don't allow communication from outside. Male and female inmates are kept separate and provisions like pen, paper etc. are denied. In terms of the condition of jails and the duration of arrests, there is co-ordination between different states and once the stipulated dates of confinement comes towards a close, inmates are shifted to other states with new charges. Prisoners are not allowed to meet their relatives who are harassed and sent back. Letters from outside had not delivered and prisoners have no right to right letters to his own correspondents. The party for instance wrote several letters to the five comrades jailed in Bhopal but in the last 3 years, not even a single letter reached them. Even though some of the prisoners released, they are rearrested using section 110. The surrendered people in Gadchiroli, were put back in prison in this way.

More remarkably, the Area Committee member of Gondia division had been released 5 times from prison and each time he was put in jail again. And there are half-a-dozen such cases. Comrade Madanlal, State Committee member, Maharashtra, was kept in Chhattisgarh, where after he was transferred to Maharashtra and after the stipulated time, again he was brought back to Chhattisgarh with 14 new cases.

Cases are not being heard. I and Comrade Arun Perera in Nagpur jail, where we were in hunger strike for 27 days, finally forced the High Court to give orders to speed up our cases. But still after 2 and half years, even after being acquitted from the main cases, and the stipulated time till 16th December, Arun Perera has been put back with 8 to 10 more cases.

Right now, due to advancement of the class struggle, mass struggle and civil liberties struggle in Andhra Pradesh, one can see some difference in the scenario, however there is no basic difference in the nature and character of the state. For the problems faced by the ordinary prisoners and Naxal prisoners, a forum had been built under whose leadership several movement were launched. When the Congress government gave release orders on which Telugu Desam Party put a stay order through High Court, this move was vehemently resisted by Maoists and Janashakti prisoners. It was because of such struggle, due to which some difference can be present in Andhra prisons. Again, there was a struggle in September, October 2008 when several ordinary prisoners died due to B1, B2 vitamin deficiency in Warangal jail. The Maoist prisoners who had won the right of separate kitchen, along with Janashakti prisoners in their commune had better dietary condition, but ordinary prisoners were exploited in their food ration leaving to the death of 22 prisoners. An all-jail strike call was given giving to a big movement. There after 11 ordinary prisoners from jail were disposed. There was another movement in 2008 in Balimela, after the anti-naxal Grey Hound forces were ambushed. The huge strike and movement finally forced the government to acknowledge the hunger strike which was only withdrawn after a delegation has been sent.

Due to such movements, there is some advancement in the condition of some of the jails, but the rest remain in extremely difficult condition. Even the most basic facilities are denied. While the prisoners in Andhra Pradesh receive 40 Rupees. per day in terms of court day funds, prisoners in other states not even receive 20 Rupees. The rates being 10 to 15 years back. Particularly Maoist prisoners are not only kept in false charges, but were also tortured and kept in single cells. Even after release, through inter-state co-ordination, they are rearrested in front of jail doors and shuttled to some other state. Even the legal and constitutional rights are denied thereby rendering an extremely difficult situation.

At the all India level, keeping in mind the repression on Maoists and Naxalite prisoners, we must fight on a national level by even mobilizing ordinary prisoners. Such mobilization can solve some issues.

During the elections, all parties accept the fact that Naxalites are fighting for socio-economic reasons, but none of them after coming to power, accept the status of political prisoners for them.

Central Committee members Comrade Vijayda, Comrade Barunda, Comrade Shobadi and many others are kept back even after bails. Comrade Barunda has been kept back 3-4 times and even Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act cases have been put on him on a date when Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act didn't even exist. Comrade Shobadi even after her release from Rourkela case, was kept back in Jharkhand. Comrade Vijayda after receiving bail in Hyderabad case was again shifted to the Raipur jail in Chattisghad and had spent 6 years in jail. Presently he has been 70 years old. Comrade Vijay, Comrade Chintan Kishore, Comrade Janardhan and Comrade Ashutosh – all are suffering in isolated cells.

All the democratic aspirations of state claims about become farce when they come to Naxalites. Comrades in Jail fight for even primary right, even on the face of torture, Comrade Malati and Comrade Geeta were brutally beaten up but still they continued their fight bravely. False charges were put on Nirmaladi where she was kept in Jagdalpur jail against whom 139 to 140 cases. So much so that the District Superintendent of Police even gave open threats that there are many cases against her that virtually give her life sentence. There are around 40 cases against her husband. Comrade Padma was arrested in Durg and was acquitted from a murder case lodged against her, but there were five new false case put upon her and she was kept in Jagdalpur jail. Even the orders by Supreme Court or High Court were never followed.

The situation is very painful in Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand. Comrade Srinivas arrested in Andhra Pradesh, was tortured and both his hands were broken. The judge callously remarked that such things happen during interrogation. There were 27 false cases against him, including a charge of plotting when he was in jail. Comrade Pandu Ranga Reddy, Regional Committee member had 40 cases against him. There are 50 to 70 cases in Andhra Pradesh, who have been in jail for 3 to 4 years.

Such is the condition of judiciary that even lawyers coming to the fore are being threatened and obstacles are being put in the way of their promotion. There is a fascist oppression launched in Andhra Pradesh, while in other states conditions are more overtly fascist. 5 comrades were shifted to Tamil Nadu from Orissa by ridiculously linking them with the Koraput raid. An Andhra Pradesh lawyer when he went to Bhopal, was badly harassed but when he remained steadfast, the hotel owner was threatened to clear his room. The colonial legacy that the Indian state inherited has been intensified over the years in its penal regime. In all states, there is a common story where false cases are launched and through pity warrant, court custody is asked for. The judge being influenced and the custody is easily taken. Thereafter, the person is taken to another place to an excuse of investigation, where he was forced to go interrogation. By the time he was produced back in the court, he is put back in jail with 20 to 25 cases.

Obviously the police has no confidence on its false cases. After my arrest I similarly was produced in court where the Director General of Police produced 21 cases. I was taken in the name custody and was charged of large conspiracy and murder in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal and Karnataka.

So another elaborate list was made where not a single case was lodged in Andhra Pradesh. I was even charged of the murder case in Jharkhand of Sunil Mahato and the Crime Branch came to me for interrogation, knowing fully well of my non involvement just because he was asked by his superiors.

All these hurdles and weapons are being used as an obstacle in the way of Indian revolution. It is an all round conspiracy of the state. Even after the Supreme Court had given orders that once a prisoner has been acquitted of a list of cases, no new cases can be put on him or her and even after High Court has given orders for speeding up cases, none of them are ever followed.

A virtual Police Raj and fascist system is at work, particularly against the Maoist prisoners in jail. Comrades are not even allowed to speak freely or give statements. When my mother came to court, she asked me to come home immediately. When I said to her that I have been working for revolution the last 30 years, and cannot come home abruptly, this was flashed all over the media. So it is up to the state to decide regarding the statements from the media. In Andhra Pradesh or in other states,

The reason why Murali at the time of the interview had no formal function is explained in Chapter 5 "Organizational principles of the party" in the Party Constitution adopted by the unity congress 2004:

"i) If a member is arrested he/she shall be released of all responsibilities and the membership will be placed under observation. Depending on his/her behaviour during the period of detention by the enemy or in jail or after his/her coming out his/her membership shall be continued/cancelled. If continued he/she shall be admitted into the party committee, which he/she belonged to prior to his/her arrest unless the party decides otherwise."

But as Murali was formally entrusted by the party to give us the history of the early years of the party this observation period seems to be over.
