

Full text: Poet Varavara Rao's letter to publishers of *Ants among Elephants - An untouchable family and the making of Modern India* by Sujatha Gidla

To

Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

New York

(Publishers of *Ants among Elephants - An untouchable family and the making of Modern India* by Sujatha Gidla)

I address this to Sujatha Gidla also.

Dear Friends,

I just completed reading the book. There are two glaring factual errors which could have been easily corrected:

1. At the outset let me say that this book, as it deals with an untouchable caste mostly, is expected to know more about the hierarchical caste system in India. But it mentions Bhoomaiah and Kishta Goud as lambadas, a nomadic tribe. The last name of Kishta Goud itself suggests that his caste is *toddy tapper*. Bhoomaiah is a *Jangama*, a veerashaiva lingayat, a priestly caste for BCs. Both of them belong to BC castes, but not a nomadic tribe. As an accused in Secunderabad Conspiracy case, during 1974-75 I was an undertrial prisoner in the same district jail in Secunderabad where Bhoomaiah and Kishta Goud were also lodged in the cells meant for the convicts condemned to death.

2. The CPI split into two parties and CPI (M) was formed on 7th November 1964. In 1965 those who joined CPI (M) including the leadership except EMS Namboodripad were detained under the MISA with an allegation that the split away group supported China's war on India. In fact, as a sub-editor working in Directorate of advertising and visual publicity, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India I translated into Telugu the White Paper presented by the Home Minister Guljarilal Nanda in Parliament. The White Paper alleged that the split away group tried to turn

the war into civil war by digging trenches in Himayalas and getting arms from China. This I am mentioning only to say that I have personal direct knowledge of these two things which you as a publisher or the writer can easily verify from any search engines on the internet.

One can express any view depending on his or her world outlook. But one has no right to distort the facts. On this premise, I can say that this interesting reading exhibits more affection towards the subject than respect for facts, particularly from the later part of 1960s.

From 1968 I was in Warangal as a college teacher, editing a literary journal called *Srjana* devoted to the world outlook upholding Naxalbari path. I am one of the founder members of VIRASAM (Revolutionary Writers' Association), Andhra Pradesh, 1970, the literary byproduct of Naxalbari and Srikakulam Adivasi Peasant Armed Struggles led by Marxist-Leninists.

I was also implicated in Secunderabad Conspiracy case (1974-89) foisted against, particularly on Revolutionary Writers (six leading members) along with Naxalites and abettors. As the book also mentions K G Satyamurthy (SM) and Kondapalli Seetharamaiah are A1 and A2 in that case. And the case is against K G Satyamurthy and Pendyala Varavara Rao (i.e. me) Vs State. This I am mentioning because by then he was a famous poet and an underground activist who inspired thousands of young people. And the case is essentially against revolutionary writers whom he defined as *Prajanu sayudham chestunna revolutionary nedu kavi* (Today a poet is the revolutionary who inspires people to take up arms).

The charges were some criminal offences occurred in four districts – Warangal, Khammam, Nalgonda and Medak between 1970 and 74 against the accused under the leadership of Kondapalli Seetharamaiah. Formation of CPI (ML) in Babunayak Thanda of Jangaon, Warangal district, the founding of VIRASAM for which the alleged conspiracy meetings were held in Garla Oddu of Khammam district and Boyaguda of Secunderabad were charges and in the two later meetings it was alleged that KS conspired with six revolutionary writers to form VIRASAM.

Interestingly, the trial was conducted for fifteen years mostly on the VIRASAM members, the abettors and some of the Naxalite underground activists who could be apprehended, and all were finally acquitted in 1989 February.

In 1986 May I was implicated in another conspiracy case called Ramnagar Conspiracy case along with Kondapally Seetharamaiah, KG Satyamurthy as A1 and A2 along with the leaders of CPI (ML) PW. I was A14. This speaks of formation of CPI (ML) PW in 1980 and its military actions in different places in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chattisgarh, etc. till 1985. Here the case was Kondapalli Seetharamaiah Vs State.

In this case I was in prison under the TADA also till March 1989. The trial went on till September 2003. The trial was conducted only on two persons - myself and one S Sudhakar, who was the Secretary of Radical Students Union and we were acquitted.

During this period SM came out from underground in January 1990, neither he was arrested nor he was tried in this case, though he was A2. Of course this book mentions about this. Not in so many words.

NTR government in his second term between December 1994 and August 1995, has withdrawn all cases against Kondapalli Seetharamaiah.

It's true that Kondapalli Seetharamaiah could not go to attend Guttikonda Bilam (Guntur district) secret meeting where Charu Mazumdar attended and CPI (ML) AP State Committee was formed. KS was taken as a State Committee member in his absence and the book of course particularly in SM's argument itself, mentions about his organizing capacity to include him in absence.

In 1974 April – May, Kondapalli Seetharamaiah tried to mobilize all the living founder members of Central Committee, CPI (ML) into CPI (ML) COC. Of course, it was short lived.

In Telangana regional committee meeting of CPI (ML), COC a self critical report on the failures of Srikakulam struggle was accepted in 1977 March and mass line was adopted as 'Road to Revolution'. Immediately after this secret meeting KS was arrested, on 31st March 1977. Though he has given a call for withdrawal of Armed Squad Actions in the name of guerilla struggle, he was elected as the Secretary of the party while he was present there between 1976-79. SM was also in jail during that period and was released little earlier on bail.

SM came out first on bail and took membership in VIRASAM in Warangal Sahitya Patashala (January 1979). Of course he was given an honorary membership, an exceptional position, in Guntur VIRASAM Conference in 1972. He himself said that practice was not good in revolutionary organisations and since he is out he took the membership.

Radical Students Union was formed in 1974 October and held its first conference in 1975 February, second conference in 1978 February in Warangal and gave a call to students to '*go to villages*'. Radical Youth League held its first conference in May of the same year and also gave a call to youth to '*go to villages*'. These two organizations along with Jana Natya Mandali (1972) and VIRASAM conducted studies on land relations in villages and that resulted in *Jagityala Jaitra Yatra*, September 1978. SM was on bail, attended it in Karimnagar district. It was a massive meeting and gave a call for occupying lands of landlords by Dalits (Mala, Madiga) agricultural labourers and untouchable bonded labourers in Northern Telangana plain areas.

'*Go to villages*' call originally given by Charu Mazumdar was creatively and innovatively implemented under the leadership of KS. I have participated in this meeting in Jagityal.

KV Ramana Reddy, General Secretary of VIRASAM and myself attended the plenum meeting to declare the formation of CPI (ML) PW as fraternal delegates without a right to vote since we were not professional revolutionaries (full timers). Both of us were college teachers. Both of us were direct witness of the formation of CPI (ML) PW under the leadership of KS. Let me also record a fact here that Mukku Subba Reddy was the state secretary of the CPI (ML) COC between 1974-79. In CPI (ML) PW plenum Mallojula Koteswara Rao (Prahlaad) elected as state Secretary. KS was elected the General Secretary of Central Committee CPI (ML) PW.

KS was arrested as mentioned in this book at Begumpet Railway Station in 1982 January, while he was trying to go to Bombay to meet comrades of the PW Maharashtra, who were also part of the party. Till 1984 January he was in prison. During this period SM acted as the General Secretary of the Central Committee CPI (ML) PW.

The distortion of this fact in this book is that it was not SM, who organized the escape of KS from the prison ward of Osmania Hospital in 1984 January. Since SM was not able to guide the advance of the Armed Peasant Struggle in North Telangana, particularly Karimnagar, Adilabad between 1982-84, Prahlad as the state committee Secretary organized KS escape without the knowledge of SM so that he comes out and guides them.

This I hope Dr MF Gopinath also must have informed you, as he shared with me.

During this period, when SM was secretary of the Central Committee, which I assume with an understanding that when KS comes out he will hand over the responsibility to KS, Tamilnadu unit of the party in particular and Maharashtra unit in general supported him to continue. It seems the differences started here.

The essence of the documents he had put at that time were based on 1) on Three World Theory to understand the imminent war situation, 2) the character of the NTR government, and 3) that CPI (ML) PW was practising economism instead of class struggle. A considerable number of cadre and sympathisers strongly felt that the documents are only a pretext and SM with the support of Tamilnadu leadership was trying to split the party. VIRASAM leadership met both KS and SM and elaborately discussed about the differences. We were more inclined towards the SM's documents, but at the same time we were also not sure about SM's organizational capabilities and party building.

Finally we also came to a conclusion because of the existing circumstances, that SM was trying to split the party with loud pronouncements of forming a Bolshevik party.

In 1987, he was expelled from the party, after putting him under suspension for two years.

SM came out from Chennai to Hyderabad in January 1990. The information was that Kancha Ilaiah and Usa (U. Sambasiva Rao) directly brought him to the meeting place of VIRASAM 20 years conference in Rana Pratap Function Hall, Amberpet, Hyderabad. It was a big meeting attended by thousands after severe repression period under NTR's regime during 1985-89 when NTR announced 'Aata, Maata, Paata Bandh' (ban on cultural performances, speeches and songs). State indulged in wide spread forced missings and encounter killings. About fifteen thousand people were arrested under the TADA. Sujatha writes about her own experiences, her own experience of torture and harassment while she was a student of Regional Engineering College, Warangal. In 1985 September, Dr A Ramanatham, a children's doctor and the State vice president of APCLC was killed by police under the leadership of H.J. Dora, DIG, and Aravinda Rao, SP Warangal, while in a funeral procession of SI Yadagiri Reddy, who was killed by CPI (ML) PW squad. Myself and Dr K Balagopal had to leave Warangal under life threat.

SM came and sat beside me in the audience in the VIRASAM conference. He did not go to the dais and took mike as Sujatha mentioned. During the lunch hour he tried to address the press with the help of Usa and others for which I have taken objection, saying that this is not the place for him to conduct a press conference, to talk about the party politics and his expulsion. He went out along with Usa and others. I will not go into those details of his allegations against me and VIRASAM after going out.

In the press conference outside the conference premises he declared that he is going to form a CPI (ML) Bolshevik.

He joined the CPI (ML) Unity Centre which was publishing its organ called *Edureeta* (swimming against tide) along with Usa and others.

In 1990 he joined Bahujan Samaj Party and contested the elections from Mydukuru constituency for legislature assembly in Krishna district (the

reference of this village comes in the book) and lost his deposit. Later he left BSP also.

He joined CPI (ML) Praja Pratighatana and was elected as secretary. During this time he was once again underground. As he was supporting separate Telangana statehood movement (it started in 1996), the party which did not approve that stand, sent him out.

By then after my release in March 1989 because of the court orders and also life threats I preferred to stay in Hyderabad and since then I am settled here.

In 1992 Guntur VIRASAM conference, he left VIRASAM.

So to say that he is the founder member of CPI (ML) PW and till the end the leader of the revolutionary party are not facts. KS who was also expelled in 1993 from CPI (ML) PW is the leader of CPI (ML), founder of CPI (ML) COC, CPI (ML) PW and remained its leader and guide till 1987 as Ganapathi, General Secretary of Central Committee of CPI (ML) PW after KS, told in an interview.

KS has given the perspectives of *go to villages*, Jagityala Jaitrayatra, mass line and Dandakaranya perspective for building base areas, to wage peoples' war against the semi feudal, semi colonial, comprador, bureaucratic dictatorship of the state.

What all Sujatha wrote about this history is nothing but a subjective admiration for her uncle, which can at best be good reading as a fiction.

In the book itself in the beginning i.e. from the first meeting of SM and KS in Krishna district and KS's invitation to SM to come to Warangal and staying together, the writer also in more than many occasions writes about the organizational capabilities of KS as described by SM. Even in Nirjana Varadhi, an autobiography of Koteswaramma, KS's estranged wife, one can find her objective acknowledgement of KS's party organizational skills.

There are also affirmations of heresay talk of man and woman relations. I think it is in bad taste. Judgement over the characters of certain personalities like M.J. Manikya Rao, a veteran teachers movement leader and good friend of SM till the last also I think is subjective.

- Varavara Rao
(Founder Member VIRASAM,
Revolutionary Writers' Association)

Flat No. 419, Hima Sai Heights,
St. No. 6, Jawahar Nagar,
Gandhi Nagar, Hyderabad – 500 020
Ph : 09676541715

Copy to: Sujatha Gidla (with request to publishers to forward)