



FROM VILLAGES TO VICTORY: THE ROLE OF WARANGAL'S PEASANT UPRISINGS IN TELANGANA HISTORY

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Abstract

The Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle (1946–1951) stands as one of the most significant agrarian movements in modern Indian history, reflecting the collective resistance of peasants against feudal exploitation under the Nizam's rule. This paper examines the crucial role of Warangal district as a center of grassroots mobilization, highlighting key villages such as Devaruppala, Kadavendi, Khilashapuram, and Bairanpalli, where resistance evolved from localized protests into organized armed struggle. The study foregrounds the contributions of local leaders and martyrs, including Chakali Ilamma and Doddi Komarayya, whose actions symbolized the assertion of peasant agency against oppressive landlordism, vetti (forced labour), and illegal exactions.

At the same time, the paper situates these grassroots struggles within the broader political transformation brought about by Operation Polo (1948), led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It argues that while the peasant movement laid the ideological and organizational foundation for change, the decisive intervention of the Indian state dismantled the Nizam's autocratic regime and brought an end to Razakar violence. This integration not only ensured political consolidation but also enabled the institutionalization of agrarian reforms, including the abolition of vetti, recognition of tenancy rights, and expansion of rural political participation.

By linking village-level resistance with national integration, the study demonstrates that the liberation of Hyderabad was the result of a dynamic interaction between popular movements and state leadership. The Warangal experience thus represents a powerful example of how localized struggles can contribute to broader socio-political transformation and democratic restructuring.

Keywords: *Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle, Warangal District, Feudalism, Vetti System, Razakars, Operation Polo, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Agrarian Resistance, Hyderabad Integration, Rural Transformation.*

Introduction

The Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle (1946–1951) stands as one of the most powerful agrarian movements in modern Indian history, rooted in the Telangana region of the erstwhile Hyderabad State. It was a mass uprising of peasants, tenants, and marginalized communities against entrenched feudal exploitation under the Nizam's rule. While the movement was shaped by grassroots resistance in villages such as Devaruppala, Kadavendi, and Bairanpalli, its historical trajectory cannot be fully understood without considering the decisive intervention of the Indian state.

A turning point in this struggle came with the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union through Operation Polo. Led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Home Minister, this military and political action dismantled the Nizam's autocratic regime and brought an end to Razakar violence. Patel's firm resolve and strategic leadership not only ensured territorial integration but also created the conditions necessary for the consolidation of agrarian reforms already initiated by peasant resistance.

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle by linking grassroots resistance in Warangal district with the larger political intervention led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It seeks to demonstrate how Patel's leadership during Operation Polo not only ensured the integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union but also provided relief and a new socio-political framework for the oppressed rural population, thereby bridging the gap between local resistance and national consolidation.

Socio-Economic Conditions under the Nizam

Under the Nizam's administration, the agrarian structure in Warangal district was characterized by deep-rooted socio-economic inequality and feudal domination. Powerful intermediaries such as deshmukhs and jagirdars exercised near-absolute control over land, labor, and revenue systems, leaving peasants in a state of perpetual dependency. In villages like Devaruppala and Kadavendi, influential landlord families—most notably the estate of Visnuru Ramachandra Reddy—held vast tracts of land, often running into hundreds of acres. Cultivators were subjected to exorbitant rents and a range of illegal exactions, frequently forced to surrender a substantial share of their produce, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and indebtedness.

The oppressive system of *vetti* (forced labor) further entrenched social hierarchies, compelling washer men, barbers, Dalits, and other artisan communities to render unpaid, hereditary services to landlords. Agricultural labor on the estates of these elites was given priority over the peasants' own subsistence farming, undermining their economic security. Women, in particular, shouldered a dual burden—actively participating in agricultural work while simultaneously enduring social and gender-based vulnerabilities within a rigid feudal patriarchal order. The presence and activities of the Razakar militias heightened an atmosphere of fear and repression through coercion and armed intimidation. Under such exploitative and oppressive conditions, resistance did not arise suddenly but evolved organically from the everyday experiences of humiliation, exploitation, and dispossession faced by the rural population.

Leadership and Mobilization in the Telangana Struggle

The Telangana Armed Struggle was fundamentally directed against this feudal authority. The gadi represented not merely wealth but the coercive system of landlordism backed by the Nizam's regime. The Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle was influenced by prominent leaders of the Communist movement such as Puchalapalli Sundarayya, Ravi Narayan Reddy, Baddam Yella Reddy, and D. V. Rao. Their ideological guidance and organizational strategies enabled peasants to form village committees, defense squads, and parallel governance structures across Telangana, including Warangal district.

Palakurthi and the Struggle of Chakali Ilamma

Palakurthi emerged as a significant centre of early anti-feudal resistance, largely due to the remarkable courage of Chakali Ilamma/ Chityala Ilamma, one of the pioneering women leaders of the Telangana struggle. The reformist and mobilizational efforts of the Andhra Mahasabha, particularly its campaigns against *vetti* and illegal levies, played a crucial role in awakening political consciousness among the peasants of the region.

When local landlords attempted to evict Ilamma and other tenant cultivators from the lands they had been cultivating, she responded with extraordinary determination and defiance. With the active support of leaders such as Arutla Ramachandra Reddy and Chakilam Yadagiri Rao, the villagers united to protect their harvested crop from seizure by armed police and landlord agents. Even in the face of repression—when grain was confiscated and leaders were arrested—Ilamma stood firm, boldly asserting that the produce rightfully belonged to the cultivators.

Her fearless stand became a powerful symbol of resistance, particularly highlighting the emerging role and agency of oppressed rural women within the movement. The struggle at Palakurthi thus represents a foundational moment in the broader anti-feudal resistance, which gradually intensified and evolved into a more organized and militant phase of the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle.

Kadavendi: The Spark that Ignited Armed Resistance

Kadavendi occupies a pivotal place in the history of the Telangana struggle as the site where the movement decisively transformed from peaceful protest into armed resistance. The village was under the harsh dominance of landlord Visnuru Ramachandra Reddy and his son Jagannmohan Reddy, infamously known as “Babu Dora,” whose regime symbolized the oppressive feudal order.

Amid these conditions, local activists such as Doddi Mallayya, Erra Reddy Kondal Reddy, Mohan Reddy, and Nalla Narasimha began mobilizing peasants against *vetti* and illegal exactions. Tensions escalated when a peaceful procession of villagers advanced toward the landlord’s residence to voice their grievances. In a sudden and brutal act of repression, armed men opened fire on the unarmed crowd. Doddi Mallayya was seriously injured in the attack.

In a moment that would forever shape the course of the movement, his younger brother, Doddi Komarayya, just 18 years old, rushed forward to assist him and was shot in the abdomen, dying instantly. Komarayya’s martyrdom became a turning point, electrifying the entire region. Thousands of people from Devaruppala, Nirmal, and neighboring villages gathered in solidarity, marking a profound shift in the collective consciousness of the peasantry. Those who had long lived in submission now rose with courage and unity, rejecting feudal authority.

The events at Kadavendi thus ignited a widespread uprising that spread rapidly across the region, signaling the beginning of the armed phase of the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle and redefining the nature of resistance against feudal oppression.

Khilashapuram: Grassroots Leadership and Collective Action

Khilashapuram, later celebrated as “Leningrad,” emerged as a prominent centre of grassroots mobilization during the Telangana struggle. The village fell under the *Sarf-e-Khas* administration of the Nizam, and although it was technically state-controlled, nearly 90 percent of the land remained concentrated in the hands of powerful landlords such as Lingala Ranga Reddy and Nellutla Keshava Rao. The majority of cultivators were tenant farmers, heavily burdened by high rents, debts, and exploitative agrarian practices.

The emergence of organized resistance in Khilashapuram was largely shaped by the leadership of Gujjula Veerayya, under whose guidance a branch of the Andhra Mahasabha was established. Inspired by the wider momentum of the movement, particularly following the martyrdom of Doddi Komarayya, the village evolved into a vibrant revolutionary centre.

Significant socio-economic transformations were initiated through collective action: land redistribution was carried out, the oppressive system of *vetti* was abolished, and surplus lands in nearby villages such as Ibrahimpoor, Ashwaravupalli, and Narmetta were distributed among the peasants. These measures reflected not only resistance but also the creation of an alternative, more equitable agrarian order.

Owing to its successful implementation of agrarian reforms and the establishment of organized peasant governance, Khilashapuram came to be popularly known as “Leningrad,” symbolizing its revolutionary spirit. Despite facing imprisonment, Gujjula Veerayya remained committed to political activism, continuing his efforts even after his release, thereby leaving a lasting legacy in the history of the Telangana movement.

Devaruppala: Assertion of Tenancy and Land Rights

Devaruppala emerged as one of the earliest and most significant centers of organized resistance during the Telangana struggle, symbolizing the growing assertion of tenant rights and agrarian justice. The spread of reformist ideas in the village was facilitated by local leaders such as Bojjam Mallayya and Karanam Venkateswara Rao, who initiated membership, drives under the banner of the Andhra Mahasabha. Subsequently, Majji Ram Reddy assumed leadership as president of the local unit, while Karanam Venkateswara Rao served as its secretary.

The village was under the dominance of the powerful deshmukh Visnuru Ramachandra Reddy, with agricultural affairs administered by his agent Abbas Ali. Agrarian life was largely controlled by major landholding families, including the Matti, Beti, and Edunuri households, each possessing extensive tracts of land. While a few among these elites showed limited support for reform, many resisted the growing peasant movement.

A decisive turning point occurred when prominent leaders Ravi Narayan Reddy and Baddam Yella Reddy addressed a massive public gathering in the village, galvanizing the local population. Inspired by their leadership, the villagers organized themselves into twelve voluntary squads, symbolizing a new phase of collective action. The hoisting of the party flag at Golakonda Reddy's residence marked a bold declaration of defiance, accompanied by the abolition of *vetti* and a collective refusal to pay unjust levies.

The Nizam's administration responded with severe repression, imposing martial measures and arresting nearly 450 villagers. During police firing, Golla Papireddy and Mandadi Somireddy laid down their lives, further intensifying the spirit of resistance. Despite such repression, Devaruppala continued to function as a liberated stronghold of the movement until the integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union through Operation Polo, marking the end of princely rule.

The Bairanpalli Incident: Martyrdom and Resistance

Bairanpalli stands as a powerful symbol of both the brutality of feudal repression and the resilience of peasant resistance during the Telangana struggle. Unlike many jagirdari villages, Bairanpalli was predominantly a peasant-owned settlement, where cultivators exercised a greater degree of control over land. Inspired by the momentum of the movement following the martyrdom of Doddi Komarayya, the villagers organized themselves into defense squads under the leadership of Dubboori Ramireddy. To strengthen their preparedness, they constructed a watchtower (*buruj*) equipped with a war drum to alert neighboring villages in the event of an attack.

In the early hours of 27 August 1948, at around 4 a.m., Razakar forces launched a large-scale and coordinated assault on the village, reportedly supported by artillery. Despite determined resistance from local squads led by figures such as Mukunda Reddy and others, the attackers overpowered the defenders and destroyed the watchtower. In the violence that followed, several villagers, including Motu Ramayya, Motu Pochayya, and Baliya Bhoomayya, were killed. In a particularly tragic episode, twenty-five young men who had surrendered were executed on the spot. Altogether, at least 82 villagers were brutally massacred, while local memory often recalls the toll as exceeding one hundred.

The Bairanpalli massacre left an indelible mark on the collective memory of Warangal district, with nearly every family bearing the loss of a loved one. It became a poignant symbol of sacrifice and suffering, while simultaneously strengthening the determination of the people to resist feudal oppression. The preserved remains of the watchtower continue to stand as a solemn testament to the courage of the villagers and the extreme violence of the oppressive order they confronted.

Operation Polo and the Role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

By 1948, the political situation in Hyderabad State had become increasingly volatile due to the Nizam's refusal to accede to the Indian Union and the growing violence unleashed by the Razakar militia. In response, the Government of India initiated Operation Polo between 13 and 17 September 1948 to restore order and integrate the princely state.

Under the decisive leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Indian Army carried out a swift and effective military action that brought an end to the Nizam's rule. Patel's firm political resolve and strategic vision were instrumental in ensuring the successful integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union. The Razakar forces were dismantled, and the Nizam ultimately surrendered, marking the collapse of princely autocracy in the region.

For villages such as Devaruppala, Kadavendi, and Bairanpalli, Operation Polo signified the end of organized Razakar terror and repression. However, it is important to note that this intervention did not replace the achievements of the peasant movement; rather, it consolidated the gains that had already been secured through years of grassroots struggle and sacrifice.

Impact and Transformation

The integration of Hyderabad State brought about significant socio-economic and political changes in the region:

- The oppressive system of *vetti* (forced labour) was abolished.
- Land reform measures were gradually introduced to address agrarian inequalities.
- Tenancy rights began to receive legal recognition and protection.
- Rural political participation expanded, enabling peasants to engage more actively in governance.

Although the phase of armed resistance formally came to an end by 1951, the profound socio-political transformation initiated in the villages of Warangal had already redefined the agrarian structure of Telangana, laying the foundation for a more equitable and participatory rural order.

Conclusion

The Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle represents a remarkable convergence of grassroots resistance and decisive state intervention. In the villages of Warangal, peasants challenged centuries-old systems of feudal domination through courage, organization, and sacrifice. Figures such as Doddi Komarayya and Chakali Ailamma symbolize the transformative power of local action in confronting oppression.

However, the culmination of this struggle was inseparable from the intervention of the Indian state under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Through Operation Polo, Patel not only ensured the political integration of Hyderabad but also decisively ended the institutional framework that sustained feudal exploitation and Razakar violence. His firm and pragmatic leadership accelerated the transition from princely autocracy to democratic governance.

Thus, while the ideological and organizational strength of the peasantry laid the foundation for change, it was Patel's statesmanship that secured its permanence within the Indian Union. The Telangana experience, particularly in Warangal, demonstrates that meaningful historical transformation emerges from the dynamic interplay between popular movements and visionary political leadership.

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