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The Role of Chakali (Chityala) Ailamma in the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle - A Study

Dr. B. Ramesh, Assistant professor of History, Kakatiya Government College (A), hanmakonda, Telangana.

Abstract

Remarkable heroine who fought against feudal oppression during the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle. She was a valiant woman who fought with immense courage for the sake of land, livelihood, and liberation from Vetti (bonded labor). Born in Palakurthi, Warangal district, Ailamma's struggle began when she leased land for cultivation in defiance of the atrocities committed by Repaka Ramachandra Reddy the Zamindar of Palakurthi and the Vishnur Deshmukh. When the Zamindar's henchmen arrived to loot the crops she had cultivated, she resisted them fiercely and successfully protected her harvest.

Chakali Ailamma's audacity provided immense strength to the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle, and the Communist Party stood firmly in support of her. Her act of rebellion ignited a spark of consciousness across other regions of Telangana. Born into an impoverished family, Ailamma remained undeterred even after her husband and sons were imprisoned; she confronted injustice head-on, instilling fear in the hearts of landlords and Zamindars. She has gone down in history as a courageous icon a source of pride for womanhood whose legacy continues to inspire generations.

Keywords: *Chityala Ailamma, Telangana armed peasant struggle, communist party, Deshmukh.*

1.Introduction

Chityala Ailamma was born on September 26, 1895, in Krishnapuram village, Rayaparthi Mandal, Warangal district, to Oruganti Mallamma and Sailu. She hailed from a socially backward family that earned its livelihood through their traditional caste occupation laundry work. Ailamma was married in her childhood to Chityala Narasayya, a native of Palakurthi. The couple had six children: five sons and one daughter. Chakali Ailamma leased land for agricultural cultivation. However, the Deshmukhs of Vishnur took offense at Ailamma cultivating this leased land and attempted to seize her harvested crop using their henchmen. Yet, with the support of the Communist movement, Chakali Ailamma successfully defended her harvest against the Deshmukhs and brought it safely to her home. Thus, Chakali Ailamma stands as a valiant woman who displayed immense courage and valor during the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle; holding high the Red Flag, she rose in rebellion against the atrocities of the Deshmukhs and the Razakars, demonstrating extraordinary fighting prowess in the struggle.

2. Chakali (Chityala) Ailamma History

Chakali Ailamma was one of the valiant daughters who fought in the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle. A beloved daughter of Telangana, Chakali Ailamma was born in 1895 in the village of Kishtapuram, located in the Jangaon Taluk of Warangal district. At a very young age, she was married to Chityala Narsayya, a native of Palakurthi.

Ailamma had five sons and two daughters. Given the large size of her family, making ends meet was a constant struggle. The gatika (sorghum porridge) which she received as alms in exchange for washing clothes was never sufficient to feed everyone. Faced with these compelling circumstances, Ailamma leased four acres of land from Utthamaraju Kondal Rao, the Makhtedar (revenue farmer) of Mallampalli, who owned 40 acres of land in the vicinity of Palakurthi. Kondal Rao's mother, Jayaprada Devi, granted Ailamma permission to cultivate the land. She subsequently cultivated those four acres. In those days, the practice of Vetti (forced labor) was the norm. Washing the clothes of the Doras (feudal lords) and their families, carrying heavy loads, sweeping the courtyards of their fortified mansions (Gadhis), and running for miles ahead of the Doras' carriages (serving as their escorts) were all integral parts of this forced labor system.

Against this backdrop, in the Jangaon Taluk, the Andhra Mahasabha under the leadership of Jeedi Somanarsayya and the Communist Party under the leadership of Arutla Ramachandra Reddy organized meetings in every village to raise public consciousness by questioning and challenging the hegemony of the Doras. They would mobilize people from marginalized castes and the farming community in large numbers, raising their awareness. The public affectionately referred to them as Sangampollu (members of the Sangham). Ailamma's husband, Narsayya, and her son were drawn to the activities of the Sangham and actively assisted in rallying the people. Sometime around 1945–46, a public meeting was organized in Palakurthi. This event became a source of deep irritation to Ramachandra Reddy, the Dora (feudal lord) of Visnur. It was precisely at this juncture that Sesha Giri Rao the Police Patel of Palakurthi pressured Ailamma and her family to come and work on his fields; she, however, firmly refused to do so. When his tactics failed to yield results, the Patwari (village accountant) of Palakurthi lodged a complaint with Rapaka Ramachandra Reddy the Deshmukh of Visnur alleging that Ailamma's family had joined the Communist movement. The Deshmukh could not tolerate the fact that Ailamma's family had not only defied the practice of Vetti (forced labor) but had also independently leased land for cultivation.

The Visunuru Dora (feudal lord) dispatched henchmen in an attempt to plunder the crops in Ailamma's fields. Ailamma stood her ground courageously and defied them. Tucking the end of her sari firmly into her waist and wielding a sickle, she roared like a lioness. With the assistance of Communist activists, she drove the henchmen away. Skillfully and safely, she brought the harvest home. Those were the days when the downtrodden masses lived in utter subjugation, constantly uttering, "I am your slave... I bow at your feet!" The lives of people belonging to castes such as barbers, washermen, weavers, potters, and others were consumed entirely by the Vetti (forced labor) system albeit on a rotational basis. Before the sun had even risen, they would appear at the Gadis (feudal mansions) to perform every conceivable chore. Stripped of their identity and self-respect, they eked out their existence in truly wretched conditions. If one had to pass in front of the Dora, one was compelled to remove the turban from one's head and the sandals from one's feet, carrying them in one's hands while walking with a deep, submissive stoop.

As for the women their plight was even more harrowing! There was no limit to the atrocities committed by the Doras and the wealthy landlords. The excesses of the Deshmukhs and landlords were escalating in severity day by day. Their sins had ripened; they had become an unbearable burden upon Mother Earth. In that era, when feudalism and monarchy had fused to unleash tyrannical rule upon the working masses, the womb of Time itself swelled with purpose and gave birth to the children of struggle. Visunuru Ramachandra Reddy was one of the prominent Deshmukhs in the districts of Nalgonda, Warangal, and Khammam. He was a Deshmukh who held dominion over 40,000 acres of land spread across 40 villages within the Jangaon taluk (administrative division). Among the others, Jannareddy Pratap Reddy the Dora (feudal lord) of Errapadu in the Suryapet taluk of Nalgonda district owned a staggering 150,000 acres of land. The Deshmukh of Kalluru, in the Madhira taluk of Khammam district, held control over 10,000 acres.

The Dora of Visnur had earned the notorious reputation of being a "demon in human form." For such a monstrous figure, the mere act of common people raising their heads in the neighboring village of Palakurthi constituted a direct challenge to his feudal hegemony. Consequently, the Dora intensified his campaign of repression; he had both her husband and son thrown into prison. He then attempted to use hired goons to loot the crops standing in Ailamma's fields. Ailamma, however, stood her ground with unwavering courage and defiance. Tucking the end of her sari firmly into her waist and brandishing a sickle, she roared like a lioness. With the assistance of Communist activists, she successfully drove away the goons and, with great resourcefulness, safely transported her harvest home. In his memoir, *Telangana Armed Struggles: Direct Experiences*, Bhimreddy Narsimha Reddy a prominent leader of the Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle recounted that the warning Ailamma issued to the Dora's goons when they attempted to attack those of us sheltering in her home is an event that can never be forgotten in the annals of history. The news that Ailamma had successfully brought her harvest home spread rapidly to the surrounding villages. A sense of self-confidence took root among the masses the conviction that if they stood firm and fought back, victory would undoubtedly be theirs.

The monumental Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle whose seeds were sown through the blood sacrifice of Bandagi and Doddi Komaraiah was given a decisive turn by the sheer audacity of Ailamma. From that moment on, popular uprisings erupted like a surging tide across regions such as Kodakandla, Kotapadu, Kadavendi, Devaruppala, Aitipamula, Balemla, Mondrai, Mallareddygudem, Annaram, and others. It was during this very phase that Doddi Komaraiah became the first martyr of the Armed Peasant Struggle. The Dora (feudal lord), harboring an escalating vendetta against Ailamma, began orchestrating attacks against her using hired thugs. Yet, making self-confidence her weapon, she stood her ground and confronted him. The Dora subsequently filed a case of rioting against the Sangham (Association) leaders Bhimreddy Narsimha Reddy, Nallu Pratap Reddy, Katkuri Ramachandra Reddy, Chakilam Yadagiri Rao, and Venkateswara Rao who had stood by Ailamma in her efforts to safely harvest and transport her crops home. This incident subsequently became renowned as the "Palakurthi Rioting Case." On this very matter, as these leaders were traveling to Bhongir to present their grievances to the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), the Dora once again unleashed his thugs to assassinate them. One of the leaders, having narrowly escaped the attack with severe injuries, made his way to Hyderabad still wounded with the sole intent of appealing to the courts for justice. This news was prominently featured in the Meezan Urdu and Telugu daily newspapers (with Adavi Bapiraju serving as the editor of the Telugu edition). With the assistance of Konda Lakshman Bapuji, the court ultimately delivered a verdict in favor of Ailamma. Thus, her struggle made headlines in the newspapers of that era. Her daughter, Soma Narsamma who was then a nursing mother was forcibly violated and disgraced by the Dora's (feudal lord's) henchmen.

Consequently, her husband abandoned her. Yet, with unwavering resolve, she transformed her home into a Communist Party office and sharpened the edge of the struggle. Like a burning ember, she constantly kept the flames of resistance alive. In the course of this struggle, Ailamma lost both her husband and her son. Despite having breathed life into a movement that ultimately brought about the end of the Nizam's regime, Ailamma herself received no honors. The Chinese government commissioned a translation into Chinese of the book *Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle: My Experiences*, authored by Puchalapalli Sundarayya; in this work, Sundarayya prominently highlighted Ailamma's heroic role. It is noteworthy that she did not even receive the benefit of a freedom fighter's pension.

The only photograph of Ailamma currently available to us depicting her as a frail, elderly woman was taken by a Communist activist who had promised to help her secure a pension, on the occasion of the tenth-day memorial ceremony (Dashadin Karma) for Arutla Lakshminarasimha Reddy held in Pemberthi. Chakali Ailamma who breathed life into a magnificent struggle that placed rifles in the hands of the downtrodden (those who once meekly bowed their heads and pleaded, "I am your slave... I bow at your feet...") and caused the feudal fortresses (Gadilu) to tremble in fear, breathed her last on September 10, 1985. A Telangana activist and valiant woman, she was the heroic mother who heralded the first land struggle and a courageous pioneer

who ushered in an era of social modernization. Since 2022, the Government of Telangana has officially observed Ailamma Jayanti.

On September 10, 2015, Brinda Karat a member of the CPM Politburo unveiled a bronze statue and memorial pillar in Palakurthi, the constituency headquarters, honoring Ailamma, who stood as an inspiration for mass struggles.

3. Conclusion

Chityala Ailamma was a valiant daughter of the soil who fought in the world-renowned Telangana Armed Peasant Struggle. She was a heroic woman who, in those turbulent times, placed rifles in the hands of the downtrodden those who were once compelled to utter the humiliating phrase, "I am your slave; I kiss your feet" and made the feudal strongholds tremble with fear. Born into a poor family, and unable to sustain her livelihood through her traditional occupation as a washerwoman, she leased land and rose up in rebellion against Visunuri Ramachandra Reddy a man who was nothing short of a monster in human form.

By defying injustice in the face of immense adversity, she demonstrated the significance of women to both the society of her time and that of today, thereby earning renown as a true heroine. Chityala Ailamma remains an enduring role model for contemporary society.

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