

In Memory of Dr. Ramanadham

The late sixties marked the first major crisis of independent India at all levels of its economy and polity. This crisis gave birth to radical movements. Among these were the tribal and peasant struggles led by Marxist Leninist parties. Brutal state repression was launched on these movements. Regional civil rights organisations arose as a response to the various illegal modes of repression. Thus in 1974 Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee [APCLC] was founded in Andhra Pradesh.

Those were the times when A. Ramanadham, a medical doctor by profession, founded one of the district units of APCLC in Warangal town.

Born in Mustikuntla, a small village in Khamman district in 1933, he started his career as a government doctor. Dissatisfied with the unethical medical practices, he left his job and set up his own Children's Clinic in 1968 in Warangal. That year marked the beginning of his involvement in various social issues. The clinic was to become, perhaps, the only democratic centre in the entire town.

In June 1975, Emergency was imposed institutionalising the ongoing repression. Dr. Ramanadham, along with other activists, were arrested. After lifting of Emergency APCLC was able to function again. Dr. Ramanadham became its Vice President.

Civil rights organisations that had earlier been confined to their own regions and histories, began to share information and experiences. Joint investigations into repression on worker and peasant struggles and joint campaigns on repressive laws. In this process of building fraternal relations PUDR came to know the work of Dr. Ramanadham. And to appreciate his gentle friendliness and modesty

Dr. Ramanadham's involvement with civil liberties was inseparable from his professional role as a doctor. In fact, his professional role helped the civil rights movement which, in turn, made him a better doctor. It helped him to understand the social origins of the diseases of his patients He did not confine himself to giving medicines but tried to spread a scientific outlook. Out of this came his famous book in Telugu, Medical Guide which was addressed to the people and not to health workers.

Dr. Ramanadham tried to create a space for democratic values wherever he went and in whatever he did. Struggling against corrupt medical practices in a health centre in Husnabad, helping friends to bring out a revolutionary literary journal in Warangal, helping a young girl and conducting her marriage against the will of her influential parents, organising a people's clinic with the help of doctors on strike in front of Warangal -Government Hospital, are examples of Dr. Ramanadham's involvement and initiative in democratic concerns

In the late seventies peasant struggles for higher agricultural wages and against landlord repression spread in Warangal and other districts Police was given

extensive illegal powers to repress these struggles. Governments kept changing but state violence continued. With APCLC, Dr. Ramanadham was actively involved in investigating fake encounters, custodial torture and deaths. This earned them the wrath of the police

On 2nd September 1985, at Kazipet railway station, SI Yadagiri Reddy was shot dead by unidentified assailants, believed to be naxalites. Next morning his body was carried in a funeral procession in which a number of armed policemen participated. The procession was led by the district Superintendent and the Deputy General of Police. When it neared the Children's Clinic, a group of policemen broke into the clinic. They ransacked the clinic and assaulted the compounder and waiting patients. Then they went into the neighbouring shop, Kalpana Optical, where they found Dr. Ramanadham and shot him at point blank range. Immediately after, a neighbouring doctor took him to Mahatama Gandhi Memorial Hospital, about two kilometres away. Soon after he was declared dead. With his death the Warangal unit of APCLC" ceased to function

Four days after his death, police filed a second FIR in the Yadagiri Reddy murder case, the first murder case to be registered under TADA in Warangal. Dr Ramanadham was named as accused. However, in the case of the murder of Dr. Ramanadham, no accused were named. Police maintained that naxalites were responsible and they had used snatched police revolvers. Two policemen were suspended for dereliction of duty as their revolvers had been snatched

Barely a year later J. Laxmareddy, President of the Karmmagar unit of APCLC was killed by police on 7 November 1986. The Warangal unit was revived with the efforts of N. Prabhakar Reddy who became its convenor. A lawyer by profession, he was instrumental in obtaining bail for hundreds of rural youth charged under TADA. On 7 December 1991, police came to his house and shot him dead.

The murders of civil rights activists are not random acts of violence by a few deviant policemen. These are part of a larger political policy of the government against the people. Perhaps the only meaningful way of remembering Dr Ramanadham is by committing oneself to the movement for democratic rights and affirming our faith in people's struggles to implement and extend these rights.