

In Memory of Dr. Ramanadham

The late 1960s 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 was arrested, along with other activists. After the lifting of the Emergency, APCLC was able to function again and Dr. Ramanadham became its Vice President.

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. As part of the APCLC, Dr. Ramanadham was actively involved in investigating fake encounters, custodial torture and deaths. This earned the APCLC the wrath of the police.

On 2nd September 1985, at Kazipet railway station, police SI Yadagiri Reddy was shot dead by unidentified assailants, believed to be naxalites. Next morning the 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 Inspector 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, a neighbouring doctor took him to Mahatma 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 SI 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 Karimnagar 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. T. Puroshottam, a lawyer and Joint Secretary of APCLC was killed on 23 November 2000 outside his house in Hyderabad. On 18 February 2001, Md. Azam Ali, teacher and secretary of the Nalgonda district unit was killed in a similar manner. In the last two instances, the attackers belonged to an armed group with tacit support of the police.

Other troubled regions of our country have also suffered the killings of civil rights activists. Jaswant Singh Khalsa of the Human Rights Wing of the Shiromani Akali Dal examined cremation records, firewood logs and unclaimed body registers to estimate that over 25,000 people had been executed by security forces with over 2000 documented in Amritsar and Taran Taran districts. He was abducted, tortured and killed by policemen in 1995. Z.V. Yaopei, a lawyer documenting excesses by the security forces in Nagaland and Manipur was killed in Dimapur in 1996. On 8 March 1996, Jalil Andrabi, a human rights lawyer from Jammu and Kashmir was abducted by army personnel. His dead body revealing torture wounds was recovered from the Jhelum river on 27 March. Again in 1996, on 17 May, Parag Das, the Editor of Budhbar, later of *Asomiya Pratidin*, and General Secretary of the Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti, Assam was killed by a state sponsored armed group in Guwahati.

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 them is by committing oneself to the movement for democratic rights and affirming our faith in people's struggles to implement and extend these rights. This meeting is also to remember and honour them.

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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