

Punnamura Ramachandrarao

A short transcriptive note on P Ramachandrarao, interviewed in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh on September 17, 2004

I was born on 13 July, 1924 in Kakinada. My father was an Ayurvedic doctor and prepared his own herbal medicines to administer to the ailing. My grandfather, Mallad Sachhidananda Naike, was a businessman and used to go to Burma quite often by ships that had no motors. He contributed Rs eight lakh for the upliftment of the poor.

I graduated in 1953. I was active in All India Students' Federation and used to organise Andhra Progressive Sabhalu that was known as Abhyudaya Sangham. I was keen to know more about Marxism as I came in contact with Com CVK Rao, one of the founders of the Communist Party in the region. In 1946, there were elections and I worked as election agent for the communist candidate. By then I was a member of the Communist party in the state. There were no election symbols then, only colours. The yellow colour was for the Congress, blue for the radicals like Socialists and red for the Communists.

I used to go down to several areas to work for the party. After 1952, I became the secretary of the Kakinada unit of the party. In 1956, I contested for the municipal corporation of the Kakinada town and won. Later in 1956, I again got elected. In 1959, I got elected without opposition. In 1967, I was elected Vice Chairman of the municipality defeating the Congress candidate. I was the only communist among all the ward members. In 1955, I was asked by the party to contest for the Assembly seat, but lost. In 1954, CVK Rao was expelled from the party for his divergent views and contested elections in 1956 as an independent candidate. I was nominated by the CPI. In this election, votes got divided and Congress candidate won with a margin of only 500 votes.

CVK Rao was from Kakinada, a coastal town and away from Telengana. Yet all the party members were directly or indirectly involved in the struggle. CVK was a known trade unionist in the area who had organised for the first time many workers. He had studied in Oxford university and got influenced by Marxist ideas. After returning in 1937, he sacrificed his career to become a whole timer.

Before CVK Rao entered the trade union, Bullock cart drivers were organised by M Virmayya, R. Satyanarayan in 19 1932-37. They had launched a struggle against imposition of municipal tax on carts. There were two types of carts, single and double. The single ones were used for carrying the passengers while the double carts were cargo carrying and these were taxed.

Kakinada, with an anchored port, has stevedores too to carry the cargo from one vessel to another and down to the port. There were also cargo boat workers who got down the cargo from the ships. At least 400 to 500 workers were engaged in the job. Under CVK Rao and another Comrade called PS Sarma, all these workers were organised in 1937.

The region is green with palm trees and fibres are used to in various types of products. There were 500 fiber workers among whom most were ladies. They were all organised by CVK Rao and PS Sarma in 1937. The salt workers were also organised in this period.

In 1948-68, press workers were also organised by NK Vishwanathan and K Apparao.

In Kakinada, no second line leadership was developed in this period. After CVK Rao left, there was no one in his generation. Though I was very young then, I had to shoulder the responsibilities of leadership in the area.

AITUC also organised the hospital workers led by NK Vishwanathan. In 1962-74, 600 workers of boat building yard were organised in a union by me. In this period, the other unions organised by me were Fisheries Corporation workers' union, Andhra Pradesh Port workers' union in Kakinada, Weavers' union, Railway workers' union with 2000 workers, engineering workers, automobile workers.

The first union organised by me was that of fishermen. I introduced mechanised fishing in 1960 by launching seven mechanised boats in the sea. Government had subsidised the price of such boats.

I am also worried about the changing character of the workers. I remember the example of SRMT union where automobile workers were organised. When the management did not like the interference of the union in its decisions, as they demanded a hike of Rs 40 and agitated for the same, the salary of the union workers was hiked by Rs 50 a month but on condition that union must be dissolved. Entire leadership of the union accepted the offer and left the union. I was alone in refusing the offer. But the union was finished.

I am now retired as I am suffering from various illnesses but I am firm in my belief that Marxism is the only solution for the future society.

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A short biographical note on P Ramachandrarao, interviewed in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh on September 17, 2004

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Ramachandrarao is leading a retired life as he is suffering from various illnesses but he is firm in his belief that Marxism is the only solution for the future society.