



## Obituary

# C V Subbarao

## Crusader for Social Justice

C.V. Subbarao, Secretary, People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), passed away on January 17, 1994, following a massive heart attack.

Born in Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh on November 17, 1953, Subba's life was always inspired and shaped by the struggles and aspirations of the people through four decades of development in post-colonial India. More than anybody else, Subba's life cannot be divorced from the organisations with which he was associated, to which he devoted his creative energies, and from which he drew his strength, stimulus and sustenance.

Srikakulam in the late sixties witnessed an uprising of peasantry that swelled to engulf the surrounding regions, through the early seventies. The struggles and sacrifices of countless youth who were drawn into this up-surge, the songs and poems of Sri Sri, Cherabanda Raju, Subbarao Panigrahi and others left a sharp imprint on Subba in his student days.

He was drawn to the revolutionary student movement sparked off in the wake of the Srikakulam movement. He began his political activity as a B. Sc. student, and was elected the first Vice President of the Andhra Pradesh Radical Students Union (now banned in the state), in 1974.

But it was his passion for literature more than anything else that first drew Subba towards revolutionary politics.

At the age of 13, Subba wrote his first poem. It was dedicated to Gurajada Apparao. The poem was read out at a Vishaal Andhra gathering at which Sri Sri was chief guest. His fascination for this nineteenth century litterateur, whose play *Kannyasulkama*, a mile-stone in Telugu literature, celebrated its centenary in 1992, is perhaps rooted in his empathy for literature that captured not just contemporary social concerns but also the lives of the people. Ironically, his last public presentation, at a seminar on contemporaries of Fakirmohun Senapathy organised by the Sahitya Akademi on January 14, was also focussed on Gurajada Apparao. Subba has written poems, short stories, essays in literary criticism, a play *Thodwnileni Povulu*, and an anthology of articles by social scientists on literature entitled *Vibhata Sandhalu*. His ambit embraced Bengali, Punjabi, Oriya, Marathi, Hindi and Urdu literature.

After spending a few months underground in Bhopal following the declaration of Emergency, Subba finally returned to his home in Vishakapatnam on October 25, to be immediately arrested. He completed his Masters in Economics in the Vishakapatnam jail - with a first class first. He was finally released on March 28, 1977 after the Janata government was formed at the centre. On his release he got immersed in a campaign to free political prisoners. Subba came to Delhi in 1977 and then began his active involvement in the democratic rights movement. While he had been involved in some of the activities of

the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) in his student years at Vishakhapatnam it was only after the emergency that he plunged into the current of the civil rights movement. His association with APCLC continued, though Delhi became the new area of his political involvement. Even so his roots remained in Andhra, and for those in Delhi he was in a sense a window to the movements in Andhra Pradesh.

The Delhi chapter of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) together with PUDR organised a convention on release of political prisoners during the Janata regime. Subba was part of an effort to bring out a collection of the writings of poets during the emergency. Apart from issues like repression of miners in Chattisgarh, tribals in Singhbhum, peasants in Telengana, he helped issue a report on "Rape, Society and State." The first civil rights fact-finding after Jagtial and Sircilla (A.P.) were declared disturbed areas in 1978 was organised in large measure due to Subba's efforts.

The massacre of about 60 tribals making their way to the first conference of Girijan Ryathu Sangham, in April 1981, took place at Indervelli (Adilabad). Subba was part of the fact-finding group looking into this massacre. More than 500 weekly activist meetings later, People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) has grown. Crucial to its conception and growth was the recognition that it is not enough to struggle for the enforcement of civil liberties, it is also necessary to fight for its extension and enforcement, to go beyond the

symp-toms. His social and political concerns spurred his intellectual activity. He worked on topics as diverse as Agrarian development in Mao's China (M Phil Dissertation), the political economy of Hyderabad, and the na-tionality movement in the North East (Ragulukune Raakshasuboggu).

For Subba his intellectual concerns were always directed towards enriching the movement - he despised intel-lectual attainment for personal gain. Hence his most cherished project, his book on political economy (Raajakiya Arthikasastram), was written for activ-ists. He wanted to share as much of his insights into society and polity, life and struggle, and the gray areas in each domain, with as many others as possible.

Which is perhaps why he made such a good and committed teacher. He taught undergraduate students at SGTB Khalsa College (Evening), Delhi University. His interests in teaching ranged from school children (he was associated as a friend with the Vikas Bharati School at Hyderabad), he taught methodology courses to M A and MPhil students. He also taught a course on development theory to MPhil students during the summer vacation at CESS, Hyderabad. At an informal level he guided innumerable students in various disciplines.

Whether it was the controversy around reservations and the Mandal Commission or the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi dispute, he always attempted to steer clear of the traps that structured orchestrated discourses laid. Many of the PUDR reports re-lect his concern to interrogate the media, academics, and those with theoretical orientations.

His close interactions with women's organisations in Andhra as well as Delhi affected him deeply. Along with many friends Subba has been helping to bring the works and

life of Alexandra Kollontai to Telugu readers. This underlay his preoccupation with the complex interactions between the spheres of material life and culture, production and reproduction, family and society, the personal and political, through which patriarchy operates. It is in these interactions that he sought the sources of gender oppression as well

as the spaces for resistance and dissent. PUDR reports have attempted to explore the mechanisms of patriarchy and the privatisation of social violence, whether it was involved in fact finding into repression of tribals, army repression or communal riots. Subba was part of this continuing collective effort.

**PUDR, Delhi**

## *Around the Pomgranate Tree*

*Go around the pomegranate tree  
and you'll see  
tiny flowers  
with flecks of white  
and breasts  
hanging down infolds like  
old curtains  
peculiar indeed  
yet  
delicious in its own way*

*Shama Shukla*

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