

Born a tribal – transformed into a revolutionary

Prasad, Dandakaranya

He was born into a Madia Gond tribal family. He grew as a tribal, worked as a tribal and gradually transformed into a revolutionary. The process is part of history, the history of Dandakaranya, the area where the process of social progress is going on for the past four decades. This is about Maniram Vedada known as Somji among the ranks of the CPI (Maoist) who lost his life in an accident on 18th February 2021 near Amabeda of Kanker district of Chhattisgarh.

The family is of Vedada clan, one of the biggest in the tribe and at first lived near Katrai-Koroskoddo villages on the hill top. This little hilly area falls under Narayanpur district but in fact near to Koyilbeda, the block center of Kanker district and is adjacent to Narayanpur district. The family was poor and cultivated on the hill slopes for a living. The family was growing and was short of land. It then decided to go down the hill and settled in Aldand on the bank of River Mendki. Somji is of the second generation of the family after shifting to this village. Somji's father had two wives and he is the sibling of the younger wife. He has a sister born to the elder wife, a sister born to his mother and three younger brothers.

As a boy he went to the fields together with his parents and sisters and cultivated land. He experienced all the difficulties that a tribal family has. The family had to work hard for a living. The rain dependent agriculture does not yield crop the same way every year. More rain, untimely rain, lack of rain at the necessary time or no rain affects the crop. Being the elder Somji had to look after the younger ones when on work. One day he slipped his hold and his younger brother fell down. He received beatings from his father. This made him alert towards his responsibilities in the family as the eldest boy.

The situation of the tribal family created some thought in Somji's little mind. He did not take things casual but started to think why and how about all what he saw.

Gradually the family rose to attain the status of middle class. The younger ones became big and started to work in the fields and Somji's father sent him to school. Thus Somji made his first step into a world other than the age old. In the school Somji proved to be an active student. He was good at sports. He played football and volleyball. After his primary studies in the school in the village he went to Chota Betiya a little away from his village for secondary education. He went to school in the morning and returned in the evening. The little town of educational and business activities took Somji one more step further into the world. Here he saw a world other than agriculture and tribal. He became inquisitive. He thought of new things. He bought chocolate and tobacco from Betiya and sold them in his village. Anyway he could not continue due to lack of money.

Somji developed as a good sports person. His schoolmates were confident to have him in their team. He assured victory. Not only the students but the Bengali people nearby also took him along at the time of tournaments. The Bengalis settled as villages since almost above two generations at the time of famine in their state. Acquaintance with the Bengali people added another dimension to Somji's world outlook. He saw their houses, their culture, their food habits and their problems. He thought that problems lie everywhere. The Oravs of his village was another tribe with which Somji was very close. He saw into their lives too that differed only slightly with theirs.

At this time 'strangers' started coming into their village. The 'strangers' were different from those he saw until then. They spoke things he did not hear until then. They were the Maoists. The CPI (Maoist) that crossed River Godavari and entered the jungles of Gadchiroli extended into Bastar.

Sukhdev was one of the initial leaders who moved in those villages. Sukhdev is still remembered among the people of the villages he visited. Somji heard him speak in the meetings. He heard the revolutionary songs that the Armed Squad sang during the meetings. He was attracted. He went near them.

Sukhdev was fond of children. So when Somji came he made him sit near him. He told him what children did in the revolutions in Russia and China. He told him how to think and the way for a better life. Somji's vision grew further. Somji knew to ride motorcycle and tractor. He helped the squad in travel and transport. During this time there were police patrols in the area and the party told the youth of the village that it was their duty to protect their village. It formed the Militia. Somji became part of it. He stayed sentry near River Mendki along with his friends in the village.

The commander of the Armed Squad that frequently visited the village paid special attention to Somji because he was an inquisitive youth. He appeared to think other than the routine. Somji discussed the problems in his school with the commander. The commander told him ways out of it. Somji discussed these with his friends and tried to convince them to solve together. In a process Somji started to think he has to do something more. He finally decided and told the commander that he wished to join and work like them. The party thought of his proposal and took him into the squad after sometime.

Somji became a member of the armed squad in 2003. He went around the area with the squad. His inquisitive mind made him talk extensively to the people he met. He heard their problems and found those were nothing different from those of his family. He found them universal. The way to solve the problems was to bring down the present rulers in power and form the people's government. People need an Army of their own for this purpose. So the party formed the People's Liberation Guerilla Army, PLGA. This was the

time when Revolutionary People's Committees, RPCs began to be formed in the area. Whenever the PLGA took up actions to fight back the police patrols Somji was part of it.

Party saw the talents in Somji and gave him the responsibility of student organizer. Somji's acquaintances as a student and a sports person helped him organise the students widely. He formed them into units. He ran a library for the students to read books that give a different vision. In the process he was promoted as a cadre of Area Committee rank. Apart from the student organisation, whenever free from this work, he also met the people's organisations together with his colleagues in the Area Committee.

Then the party needed a courier to coordinate its work. It selected Somji. Somji readily accepted and efficiently did this work. Not even once he wavered in this risky job. He was steadfast in holding this responsibility that helped the party a lot. When a serious risk arose the party relieved him from the work of courier. Then he was once again involved in organisational work.

Somji was promoted into the rank of Divisional Committee in 2009. He took up student organisation as per the decision of his committee. Apart from this whenever he found time he attended the meetings of the people's organisations. He saw deep into the rising problems of the people. He developed more hatred towards the rotten society. He took an active part in Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign, TCOC. He thus developed interest in military work. The party saw his interest and the need of the movement and transferred him. He took up the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief of the North Bastar Division in 2014. Until his death in an accident he participated and led several ambushes against the mercenary armed forces of the central and the state governments.

The process in which a tribal transformed into a revolutionary shows the process of social transformation in the tribal heartlands of India. There are many such tribal youth in the Central and Eastern parts of India. They are laying their lives for the people, to liberate them from the clutches of exploitation.

This is a time where the Brahmanic Hindutwa fascism is becoming more and more aggressive. The life and death of these youth are showing a clear way out of the present daily life problems of the people such as rising prices, GST and lack of proper treatment for the pandemic Corona. One needs to think and do in the way laid by these indigenous youth of the country, without which the country will not step forward.