

DOWN MEMORY LANE

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Pedda Gantara! A Savara (tribe) hamlet bordering Srikakulm-Gajapati Districts of AP, Orissa. 20-22 small thatched hutments.

Kumaranna alias Potanapalli Appalaswamy was captured on 10th September, 1998 and tortured barbarically by police (grey hounds) in presence of top officials and killed. A bullet in the mouth! Thus fallen a people's hero about whom this writer filed a report in 1998 in *Frontier*.

Again by coincidence, this writer had been given a chance to visit the spot, the village on the occasion of 9th death anniversary of the martyr.

A 40 km stretch from this writer's native village Kasibugga-Palasa Goppili covering two Talukas—Palasa and Meliaputti to Pedda Gantara.

Surrounded by mountains of Mahendra Range, flowing streams, green valley, a scenic beauty.

A small church! Conversion process going on. When movement was there its growth was somewhat restricted and that is why, christians not in majority, including their fathers, developed enimical attitude towards communist activists. Some christians had become informers at the time of Kumaranna who was underground for 30 years since 1968 to his death on 10th September, 1998.

When Kumaranna was killed, the first time in Srikakulam his body could have been procured from police by the *committee to procure the bodies of encounter deaths*, under the orders of A P High Court and brought to Boddapadu for last rites, albeit with full police bandobast who did not allow a procession with the Body. The might is right theory still followed on in Srikakulm.

Recently, on the excuse of orders from high above and on the plea of movements of Maoists in the Andhra-Orissa Border (AOB) region as well as some important leaders entering the area, the police started their repression by calling all the ex-Maoists (ex-naxalites) to the nearby police stations, gathering their family details, again taking finger prints as well as details of their family friends including addresses. They were also asked to give attendance daily at the police station which is in just 20 km away from their hamlets. It is indirectly, an unconstitutional exercise by police. Perhaps, Human Rights Organisations may interfere into the matter now.

'The Fallen Mahendra Tanaya' (Mahendra Tanaya is the name of the rivulet which originates from the Malendra Range) was a booklet brought out by the state secretariat of *Janashakti* in which Kumar's total life is naratted in a nutshell. After passing matriculation he joined communist politics under Tamada Ganapati of the same village Buddapada. Ganapati became martyr in November, 1969 and his disciple Kumar in 1998—29 years after and much water flew in the Ganges of revolutionery movement in the meanwhile. Incidentally this village gave 12-13 martyres in the revolutionary struggle since 1968.

One Sita Ramulu, a young boy was also shot dead on that fateful day—September 10. The tribal girl now a married lady Maugidi who was stripped naked so that she could reveal where Kumaranna was hiding when they found it futile to locate him recalled those harrowing moments. She stated in details the

way in which he was shackled and took out in the street of the village before he was shot after some deliberations and clearance from the high police officials. She did not yield to humiliating torture to save her 'Bappa' or 'Nonna' by the name Kumaranna was called in that area.

She saved the diary of Kumar along with some money which she returned later to Kumar's wife Jayakka.

Photos of Kumar and Sita Ramulu were garlanded and red flag was hoisted with popular slogans reverberated in that valley coupled with revolutionary songs.

Remembering the martyrs and visiting the spots where they had fallen to police bullets has a deeper feeling.

They laid down their lives for a better tomorrow, for the down-trodden. □□□