

Biography of Gaddar

Gaddar (born as and also known as **Gummadi Vittal Rao**) (born 1949) is a pseudonym of a revolutionary Telugu balladeer and vocal Naxalite activist from the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. The name Gaddar was adopted as a tribute to the pre-independence Gadar party which opposed British colonial rule in Punjab during 1910s.

Early years

He was born in 1949 in the **Toopran village** of the **Medak** district. He came from a poor dalit family and his parents Sessaiah and Lachumamma worked as labourers to earn a living. He attended his early schooling in BODHAN of the Nizamabad district. After completing Pre University Course (then equivalent of 12th class) from a government junior college in Hyderabad he joined the [RECW] Regional Engineering College to pursue a Bachelors degree in civil engineering but dropped out after the first year to earn a living.

Gaddar married Vimala. He has two sons, called Sureedu and Chandrudu (died of illness in 2003) and a daughter Vennela.



Separate Telangana Movement

In 1969, Vittal Rao (Gaddar) joined the struggle for separate Telangana state. He formed aburakatha (a kind of folk art in Andhra Pradesh, India) troupe named after Mahatma Gandhi to spread awareness about Telangana issue. He was soon disillusioned. For a while, he gave performances on family planning and other social themes for the Indian government's information and broadcasting ministry.

Gaddar once again for separate State of Telanagana

With the resurgence of Telangana movement, Gadar once again started to express his support for the cause of Telangana and expressed his strong vocal support for all those fighting for a separate Telangana state. Despite being a hardcore communist, he doesn't share the ideas of some communist

parties of India that oppose separate Telangana state. In recent interviews on TV9, NTV, ETV he came out clearly that he is strongly with those who are for telangana. Even he expressed his solidarity with Devendar Gouds NTPP (Nava Telengana Praja Party) in spite of being shot at by the police during Goud's term as AP Home Minister. Quoting in his own words from various interviews on News channels "Even though telangana can be achieved only by political process through a bill at the center, it lies not only with the leaders of telangana parties but all those who have their lives at stake to bring about a people's movement. For a beginning let us take a big march. I Would lead the march and would be the first to take any bullets if fired at"

Gadar's song "Amma Telanganama Akali kekala gaanama" has been selected as the state song of Telangana"

Art Lovers Association

B.Narsing Rao, film director and founder of a forum called 'Art Lovers Association' noticed Vittal Rao and was impressed by his performance. He invited him to perform at a program on Bhagat Singh's anniversary. After this program, Vittal Rao began attending the weekly meetings of Art Lovers Forum on Sundays. B. Narsing Rao also asked him to write and bring something along. At the next Sunday meet, Vittal brought his first song — Apuro Rickshaw (stop rickshaw). Narsing Rao suggested changes to link the song to their lives and their labour. With that, got produced the famous song:

Stop Rickshaw-walla; I am coming; You work from morning to night, but your stomach cannot be filled; So much blood and sweat, yet you earn hardly anything...

This song, written in about 1971, became a massive hit, specifically amongst rickshaw drivers.

Then Vittal came regularly to the Sunday meets. Numerous songs were written, mostly by Vittal. They printed their first songbook. It was entitled "GADDAR"; after the famous Gadar Party of Punjab. Soon, whenever they went to perform on streets, the people began to say that the "Gaddar people have come". The name stuck, and from then on Vittalrao is known as Gaddar. Meanwhile Gaddar came to know that B Narsing Rao was linked to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Slowly Gaddar also came close to the Party.

Jana Natya Mandali

The Art Lovers Association was renamed the Jana Natya Mandali in 1972. Even while he was singing of revolution in the villages, Gaddar took a banking recruitment exam and got the post of a clerk at Canara Bank in 1975. He quit his bank job in 1984 and concentrated on Jana Natya Mandali. After he voiced his

protest against the killing of several Dalits by upper caste landlords in Karamchedu village in Prakasam district in July 1985, the police raided Gaddar's house. He went underground.

Underground

In exile, Gaddar roamed through the forests of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, spreading the revolutionary ideology through folk arts. Gaddar and his troupe adapted folk forms such as Oggu Katha, Veedhi Bhagotham (vernacular ballets using a combination of song, dialogue and dance) and Yellamma Katha (the story of the local deity) to revolutionary themes depicting the travails of peasants, labourers and other weaker sections. Jana Natya Mandali was soon regarded as the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War, a Maoist party active in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar and Orissa.

With his revolutionary songs catching the imagination of the masses, Gaddar became a legend. Hundreds of thousands of printed copies and thousands of cassettes of his songs have been distributed and sold over the last two decades.

Gaddar's attire is as well known as his songs. In his own words, 'in the beginning, we used to perform wearing lungis. But then, since women too formed a part of the audience, we thought that costume was not appropriate. Therefore, we preferred gochis (dhotis). In the same way, gongali (a thick blanket made of rough wool) worn across the chest had its own advantages. It is in the jungles that we first took to wearing anklets and a loaded rifle on the right shoulder. On the left one, we had a dolu (drum).' He sticks to the same gochi and gongali, anklets and dolu. The loaded rifle has given way to a lathi in the right hand.

After four-and-a-half years of exile, Gaddar emerged from hiding when the then Congress government led by Dr Marri Chenna Reddy adopted a 'liberal attitude' towards the Naxalites. On February 18, 1990, Gaddar met the media. Two days later, Jana Natya Mandali celebrated its 19th anniversary at Nizam College Grounds in Hyderabad. A staggering 200,000 people came to watch Gaddar.

In the last 15 years since he surfaced from self-imposed exile, Gaddar has seen six chief ministers blow hot and cold on the Naxalite movement. During this period, he has launched campaigns to protest against State repression in the countryside and killings of scores of Naxalites by the police in what he calls 'fake encounters.'

Gaddar believes those wielding political and administrative power will, one day, realise that the Naxalite issue can be tackled only by addressing the socio-economic issues in the countryside, and not through 'State terror.'

Assassination attempt

On April 6, 1997 there was an assassination bid on Gaddar. While two of the three bullets the assailants fired into him were removed, one was left untouched because of medical complications. The near-fatal attack, which the balladeer believes was engineered by the police, did not deter Gaddar from being a champion of the downtrodden.

Peace Emissary

In 2001, the Telugu Desam government accepted a proposal to have peace negotiations with Naxalites and the then Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War announced the names of Varavara Rao and Gaddar as its emissaries to work out modalities for the proposed talks. The Naxalite party was under ban at that time and these two writers were chosen as emissaries, keeping in view their yeomen services in people's causes for over three decades then. The government had also named two ministers as its representatives and after three sittings held at a time of unabated encounter killings, Varavara Rao and Gaddar pulled out of the talks' process, that went on between May and July 2002.

The then opposition Indian National Congress criticized the stand of the Telugu Desam Party with regard to the talks and made a categorical promise in its Election Manifesto 2004 to hold talks to arrive at a meaningful peace. The Congress came to power in May 2004 and initiated the talks' process in June. This time around the then Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War named Varavara Rao, Gaddar and novelist Kalyana Rao as its emissaries. The emissaries assumed their position on 13 July 2004 and had involved themselves in several rounds of discussions on modalities with the government including the Home Minister and the government representatives. Finally, leaders of two Naxalite parties (by then Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Janashakti also joined the talks process and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Peoples War became Communist Party of India (Maoist)) came for the talks held between 15 October and 18 October 2004. After this first round of talks, the negotiating parties had to meet for subsequent rounds but after the encounter killings of some naxalites in January 2005, the Naxalite parties withdrew from the process on 16 January. After some failed attempts to revive the process, Varavara Rao and other emissaries withdrew from their positions on 4 April 2005. The peace process ended with the imposition of ban on CPI (Maoist), Revolutionary Writer's Association (Virasam) and some other people's organizations on 18 August 2005.

Within 24 hours of imposition of ban on Virasam, Varavara Rao and Kalyana Rao, were arrested on 19 August 2005 under AP Public Security Act. The police did not arrest Gaddar though they say they have

evidence against him. The police accuse Gaddar of inciting violence and propagating the Naxalite ideology of 'power through the barrel of the gun.'

Unlike other left-wing revolutionary writers and poets, Gaddar is equally well known in rural and urban Andhra Pradesh. He is a familiar face on television screens, participating in protest programmes or spirited debates. His songs cut across the barriers of region, religion, dialect, caste and social status.

In the words of prominent academic Dr. Kancha Ilaiah, 'Gaddar was the first Telangana intellectual who established a link between the productive masses and the literary text and, of course, that text established a link between the masses and educational institutions.'