

Although the ill famous millionaire landlord of Silicon Valley (Berkeley), Lakireddy Bali Reddy, and his close relatives are all set to plea guilty of sex slavery before the Oakland Federal Court on March 6, not many in both U.S. and India knew that Reddy's teenaged victim of sex slavery, who died on November 27, 1999, was a Dalit hailing from his own native village in Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh. At the time of death, she was five-weeks' pregnant.

The 17-year old minor girl's original name was Usha Kiran, daughter of old-aged Dalit Christian couple, Prathipatty German and Lakshmi German. They live in Reddy's native village of Velvadam, about 30 kms from Vijayawada, South India's largest railway junction, and 300 kms. from Andhra Pradesh capital twin-cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad. Velvadam, with a population of around 8,500, falls within Mylavaram Assembly constituency.

Lakireddy Bali Reddy, who could easily call the shots in Andhra Pradesh through sheer money power, brought Usha Kiran to U.S. in August 1999 under the false name Seetha Reddy (a caste Hindu name) and as hailing from neighbouring Khammam district. Usha's younger sister, aged 15, was also brought along with her. When Usha's gruesome death out of poisoning due to carbon monoxide leaked from a defective gas heater took place in November 1999, her younger sister fell unconscious but escaped death. Also present was their apartment companion, Lakshmi (20), daughter of Yellanki Venkateswaralu, belonging to their native Velvadam village in A.P.

The incident took place at the 1,100 East Bay Apartments owned by Reddy household's "Reddy Realty". Including two restaurants in Silicon Valley, Reddy controls \$ 70 million worth property and with an estimated monthly income of \$ 1 million from rentals alone.

With the active support and involvement of his close family members, including sons and brother, Reddy had brought to U.S. around 500 persons, mostly hailing from poor families in and around Krishna District, during the past one-and-half decade. At least fifty per cent of them are said to be minor girls. Following Reddy's arrest and indictment in early last year, the U.S. consulate at Chennai had stopped issuing visa to Krishna District applicants in general and those from Velvadam village in particular.

Astonishingly, when Usha's death took place, the Reddy's claimed that her parents, Venkateswara Vemireddy and Padma Vemireddy, were with him in U.S. However, investigations revealed that the self-styled parents were yet another illegal immigrants brought by Reddy. What is more: Padma was not even Venkateswara's wife, but own sister! Venkateswara, who came posing as a computer engineer, was actually working in Reddy's restaurant. So were the girls. Following Usha's death, eye-brows were raised as to why both the parents stayed in a separate apartment, and not along with their daughters. The one who actually stayed with the three girls was the millionaire landlord, who, as well as his son, had sex with all of them!

In fact, Usha and other girls were victims of sex slavery. Hailing from poor families, and who can speak only their mother-tongue Telugu, they were literally under the control and influence of the multi-millionaire upper-caste landlord in Silicon Valley. Considering the political and

money-clout that Reddy wielded in native Andhra Pradesh, the fearful girls were forced to suffer in silence for fear of Reddy's reprisals against their poor parents back at home village.

Reddy spent lavishly in and around his village to command respects. He built five temples of Lord Krishna, schools, an engineering college, marriage hall, bus stand, etc. etc. He used to reach the native place twice in a year, for Hindu festivals of Sivarathri and Ganesh Pooja, donating around Rs. 5 lakhs for each annual festival.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, whose TDP is an important ally within BJP-led NDA ruling the Union Government, is not interested to pursue any case against Reddy. Naidu fears that any such exposure by the government would be a set back to his cherished dream of "Americanisation of Andhra Pradesh"! After all the millionaire's scandal and Usha's death took place when Vajpayee's Indian Government and Naidu's A.P. administration were in full gears to give a memorable welcome to President Bill Clinton! Therefore, following newspaper reports, the probe conducted by A.P. police was winded-up within ten days for "lack of a complainant against Reddy". The Opposition Congress-I is also not interested to apply pressure on Naidu government apparently due to APCC-I President, Dr. Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy's daughter is married to Lakhi Reddy Bali Reddy's son.

Upper-caste rivalry was floated by Reddy community members in defence of the millionaire. They term the whole episode as "mudslinging campaign" unleashed by their arch-rival Khammas. Reddys and Khammas, the foremost upper-caste and influential landlords of Andhra Pradesh, are sharply divided in Congress and Telugu Desam respectively. Their rivalry to wield political power in Andhra Pradesh started soon after India's Independence. After the reorganisation of States, the Congress party under Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, took full control of the State affairs defeating the Khamma rivals within Congress. The Khammas had to wait till January 1983 when cine-actor N. T. Rama Rao floated Telugu Desam to defeat Congress Party for the first time in A.P. and to establish the "Khamma Raj". Except for the interluding 1989-94 period, the Telugu Desam control the reigns and present Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, though a former Congress Minister prior to 1983, continue the Khamma legacy established by his father-in-law, NTR. While the Khammas and Reddys seldom engaged in mutual violence, they showed a remarkable unity in committing atrocities against Dalits and other weaker sections like the Backward Community Kapus in all the three regions of Andhra Pradesh - Telangana, Costal Andhra and Rayalaseema.

For example, the Karamchedu Dalit massacre in 1985. Karamchedu is in Prakasham District, close to Krishna District. In 1985, the most atrocious Dalit massacre took place under the leadership of the local landlord Chenchu Ramaiah, who was father of Dr. Venkateswara Rao, NTR's elder son-in-law. Dr. Venkateswar Rao was also the then Health Minister in NTR Government. Following the massacre, the entire Dalits fled from Karamchedu and lived for years in make-shift-tents at Chirala town, 8 kms. from their native village. Although Chenchu Ramaiah figured as the first accused for the massacre, the case was not proceeded. After a couple of years, several Dalit witnesses to the massacre, including the prime witness 72-year old Dalit woman, were killed in their Chirala camp. When the case was reaching nowhere, a squad of People's War Group of Naxalites shot and killed Chenchu Ramaiah at his Chirala home. It was with this incident that the PWG could muster support for the first time in and

around Prakasham District in Coastal Andhra region.

In fact, the remnants of feudalism, upon which the upper-caste landlords in Andhra Pradesh still strive, can be witnessed in the ongoing sexual exploitation of the likes like Lakireddy Bal Reddy. One's having more than one wife and concubines is still being regarded with sort of respect and money-power by the ordinary village folks. According to a senior police officer, until the Naxalites wielded influence in villages of North Telangana districts in recent years, there was a customary practice of brides belonging to the village, or brought from outside by village grooms, spending the first few days of their marital life in the local landlord's palace. Feudal practices like this came to a halt since, due to the Naxalite movement, the villages now remain with "absentee landlordism" and with the landlords migrating to district towns or capital twin cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad. Polygamy is no secret even among top politicians. A former Congress Reddy Chief Minister had four wives, while a former Union Minister belonging to Telugu Desam had three! The apartment blocks in areas like Chickedapally of Hyderabad city is known to be filled with concubines of politicians, top officials and businessmen.

This is why the democratic sections within India viewing the proceedings at the Oakland Federal Courts as and when Lakireddy Bal Reddy and his relatives prepare to plead guilty tomorrow. Reddy is on a \$ 10 million bail, while his son, Vijay Lakireddy (31), was freed on \$ 5 million bail. Others who face charges are: Reddy's elder son Prasad Lakireddy (42), Reddy's brother Jayaprakash Lakireddy (47) and sister-in-law Annapurna Lakireddy (46). All of them are charged with conspiring to bring Indians illegally into U.S. since 1986, utilising false identities and sham marriages. Reddy faces additional charges of trafficking minors for illicit sex and tax evasion, while Vijay Lakireddy is also charged with helping his father to smuggle girls into the country for sex. Although they were indicted in February 2000 on nine counts, it was later brought down to five counts indicating chances of a plea agreement.

<http://www.ambedkar.org/News/SiliconValley.htm>