

STATEHOOD DEBATE-II

People's Republic of Telangana T Vijayendra

[This article does not take a stand, pro-or anti-Telangana agitation. It identifies Telangana as a bio-geographical and linguistic region and attempts to articulate the aspirations of its people to live a peaceful life while ensuring their regional identity. It discusses the unfolding of the tragedy in terms of the struggle of different stake holders in the region. Finally it explores the possibility of an alternative vision.]

Telangana is a biogeographic region. The river Krishna forms its Southern boundary while the Eastern Ghats make up the Eastern boundary. Karnataka, Maharashtra and Chhatisgarh are its Western and Northern boundaries. A biogeographic region defines its flora, fauna and human society. Thus Telangana defines a people or a speech community. They are defined in terms of the food they grow and take; the houses they live in; clothes they wear; their religious beliefs; local deity festivals and the language they speak. There are even festivals across religion such as *pir panduga* where the ancestors are brought alive and carried around to a common worship ground, fed and appeased with dance and song! All communities take part in it.

Telangana as a biogeographic region existed before the present agitation; before the Indian Constitution; before the Nizam's rule etc. Without going into ancient history, the Telangana people as they are known today have existed for at least the past 500 years. In other words Telangana's agriculture, society, particularly its composite culture of different religions goes well back in time. It will continue as such in the coming decades if not centuries.

The agitation for a separate Telangana state is only 30-40 years old, a mere fraction in its long history as a region. It is entirely possible that in the future one may have a world without borders and 'a separate Telangana' may become meaningless, although Telangana as a biogeographic region will remain; the name Telangana will remain and hopefully a peaceful and happy Telangana region will exist. Nevertheless, as the Greek film 'One Day, Eternity' shows that a struggle for a short period may encompass a large canvas and a large stretch of history.

As is well known, Nizam's regime was a feudal society and the Nizam himself was under the British imperialist rule. So the people's struggle was against the Nizam's rule, against feudal oppression and against imperialism. This is the root of the famous Telangana struggle with a few victories and many defeats. Most of the issues continue although times and methods of oppression, exploitation and resistance have changed. New political parties have emerged on the scene and the Communist party itself has seen transition from CPI-CPI(M)-CPI(ML)-PWG to CPI (Maoist). The older issues like land reform and older organisations like the organisations of the peasantry and other working classes continue to have relevance. Well, it doesn't mean the negation of the

present agitation for a separate state. Newer and not so new issues of caste, gender, ecology, economic crisis and the crisis of capitalism itself influence the present situation.

The ruling class-talk on Telangana is about uneven development of different regions and Telangana being treated as an internal colony. Hence demand for a separate Telangana. Any development of capitalism requires exploitation of local people and resources and "colonial" exploitation of regions outside at super exploitation rate. Telangana was part of Nizam's rule, remained 'backward', and was ready to become an 'internal colony' in the Unified Visala Andhra to the region which was part of the 'advanced' British Madras Presidency.

The ruling class project in the separate Telangana agitation is to loot the Telangana people and resources with the help of multinationals as they have done in Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh. Today with people's awareness it means a civil war. They are prepared for it and as soon the new state will be formed they will unleash this war. BJP has already declared Chhatisgarh as a model for the new Telangana state. They will of course have populist measures, like creating a university for the Telangana language, primary education in local language and hate campaign against outsiders etc. But people have seen it in Jharkhand and in Chhatisgarh. They will treat any protest as Maoist and new avatars of 'strategic hamlets' and 'Salwa Judum' will emerge.

The project of the ruling classes is short term and even if they succeed they are doomed—even though they will cause much damage, violence and hardship to the people and the land. Why? It is so because capitalism is going through a deep crisis which is triggered by Peak Oil. Peak Oil means that the production of petroleum has reached a peak and will keep on declining. The material basis for capitalism is concentrated source of energy in increasing quantity. That era is over. Coal is the only alternative left- particularly in China and India. Hence there is a surge in coal mining and coal based thermal power plants. But these projects take away land from the people and are the dirtiest of polluters. Hence the people's struggle against them is also picking up momentum all over the country. In fact the rapacious policies in Chhatisgarh and some of the 'ugly' energy even in the Telangana agitation reflect this crisis.

There are already signs of decline of capitalism. Although the government granted SEZs in large numbers all over the country, many of them are not able to start and many have been cancelled. They are being cancelled because either they are not able to raise resources or the opposition to them from people is very strong. As oil production falls many projects will fail to take off the ground.

There are several trends in the project of the people. One can broadly classify them in two trends: Social Democratic and Revolutionary. The term Social Democratic is used to distinguish it from mere 'Democratic', which is used by the ruling class for its project.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC

They believe that Telangana is a distinct entity with its own distinct economy and culture. They claim to represent people's issues such as issues of class, caste, gender and ethnicity. However they believe that the struggle for separate Telangana state can encompass all these issues under one umbrella.

They believe mainly in 'democratic' methods of struggle and seek a solution within the Indian Constitution. They maintain that if the democratic processes are strengthened and significant gains for the people can be achieved, as has been done in Kerala and

West Bengal, then it is possible to avoid Telangana going the Jharkhand or the Chhatisgarh way.

Some believe that a new party may have to be formed like the 'Dalit Bahujan Party' to achieve these aims and to distinguish these class/caste interests from the TRS (Telangana Rashtriya Samiti) party.

The general understanding is that the era of bourgeois democratic revolution ended by 1871. Hence democratic agenda of the social change/revolution will have to have a socialist content. So India never had a chance of 'the 'bourgeois democratic revolution'. The Indian Constitution has tried to incorporate many aspects of social democracy within it, basically in terms of a welfare state. However, the performance of the Indian welfare state has been dismal. It has failed in obtaining basic securities of food, water, sanitation, secondary education, health and livelihood for the majority of people. Ambedkar had made a prophetic statement saying that the Constitution is raising a lot of aspirations among the poor and if they are not fulfilled them there will be a revolution.

Social democracy has been relatively viable mainly where bourgeoisie/capitalist transformation has already occurred; where the proletariat is already formed. Within India, Kerala and West Bengal had seen major social transformation in the 19th century. Parts of coastal Karnataka and Goa also have seen such developments. So in these regions and a section of the urban middle classes, there indeed have been some gains for the people. Also in some sectors of organised industry, particularly in the public sector, the working class too has got some rights and securities. But the vast majority of the Indian people have not had any gains except, as Ramchandra Guha puts it, 'they got Bollywood, Cricket and Elections'!

Specifically, 1984 is the cut off year for India where any significant pro-people measures have successfully been taken by the Indian government. The significance of the year 1984 is that, during the Bhopal gas incident none of the parliamentary parties came to the side of the people. After 1990, the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) counter revolution, all the parliamentary parties took large amounts of money from the bourgeoisie to win the election. Today the figures appear to be Rs 10 crore for a winning ticket in parliament and corresponding figures for other elections.

In Bengal and Kerala too, some progress occurred mainly before these dates. But today, even there, things are getting worse. As far as Telangana is concerned, (or for that matter Andhra Pradesh and rest of India), it has missed the bus of social democracy a long time ago.

Specifically, in Telangana, while everyone is ready to agree to a socialist/social democratic agenda, what will happen when the state is actually formed and elections are held? Why will it not go the Jharkhand way? They would all have taken large amounts of money to win the elections and will need to keep on taking money to win future elections too. Their hands will be tied.

REVOLUTIONARY TREND

Revolutionaries start with the above critic of social democracy. They believe that the people's project cannot be achieved in any Indian state today under the present Indian Constitution and 'democracy'. The Indian state has been at war with the Indian people almost from the very beginning, deploying its army and police forces against people in

different parts of the country. Today there is a full scale civil war going on at scores of places under the guise of 'problems' and 'menaces' like - Kashmir, Naga, Bodo etc. and last but not the least the Naxalite/Maoist. Today anyone on the side of the poor people is likely to be called a Maoist, arrested, tortured and even killed. The state obtains its consent to rule and carry on these policies through elections where the ruling classes pay crores of rupees per candidate. Any state, therefore, as a rule, will be forced to follow the agenda of the 'project of the ruling classes'.

The aim of all revolutionary groups is to form a new state outside the present Constitution with their revolutionary 'people's agenda'. Almost all of them believe that it can be achieved mainly through armed struggle. In addition they all believe in class organisations of workers and peasants etc. Many social and cultural organisations are also created and supported by them. Various revolutionary groups have different strategies which include supporting the separate Telangana movement and helping even to strengthen the 'social democratic' groups, because they do not want to give up any gains made by the people, like freedom of press, civil liberties and various other rights which the people have won.

Both the Russian and the Chinese revolutions were won in less than 40 years of the formation of the communist parties in their countries. The Indian communist movement is 90 years old but no revolution is yet in sight. Indian communists have been impressed by the Chinese path from the 1950s and in 1969 Charu Majumdar declared 'China's path is our path'. Forty years later, while the Maoists certainly have a significant presence, victory does not seem to be in sight. The point is Indian people do not seem to have gained much from these years of revolution. It has been a path with a few victories and many defeats. India seems to have missed the bus of revolution as well!

Specifically while the Maoists have a general vision of an egalitarian state, they seem to lack a vision which can tackle all the contradictions of the present Indian society. Secondly, they do not seem to have a vision which addresses the issues of resource depletion of the present day world. They still seem to believe in the agenda of industrialisation as a part of socialist reconstruction, or at least they do not seem to have an articulated critic of it. There seems to be no learning from Cuba.

After Vietnam in the mid-seventies, there has not been any revolutionary success in the world. The Maoists in Nepal agreed to having elections and promptly lost power, possibly signifying the end of social democracy as well as revolutionary era! What has changed? Some believe it is the 'peaking' of petrol and many other minerals which has heralded the end of industrial revolution whether under capitalism/social democracy/communist revolutionary.

WHAT MAY HAPPEN?

In reality all trends operate. For example in Chhatisgarh not only the ruling classes are ruling, but in the people's struggle there are Gandhians, CPI, Maoists, Christian groups, civil rights group, NGOs etc. Apart from the Maoists, almost all others belong to 'social democratic trend'. Although there are differences among different trends and they criticise each other, there is also some sort of informal understanding between different trends. This is so because people cannot afford to lose any little right they have, like civil rights, freedom of speech and assembly, ration cards, NREGA etc. Also irrespective of any trend they belong to, anyone who speaks for the tribals or opposes the projects of

mining, steel or power plants, is called a Maoist and treated as such. Thus the state itself is instrumental in uniting different trends!

In Telangana too all the trends are there and eventually will have to co-operate with each other. Because, if today Telangana is created, it will be under the Indian Constitution and the Telangana government will be elected in the same way as the Jharkhand and the Chhatisgarh government have been. It is very unlikely that the people's trends - 'social democratic' parties will win the elections. Even if they do, either it will be a short lived experiment or it will change colour very fast. How can it follow different policies? It will immediately sign MoUs with multinationals and declare a war on the people. Therefore, like in Chhatisgarh, eventually all the people's trends will have to struggle against the government and as has been said above, they will have to co-operate.

IS THERE A HOPE?

Yes. In as much as it is a dying ruling class, it is on its way out. While this tragedy is being played out, the pro-people forces need to co-operate and not fight emotional battles among themselves. There should be a dialogue between the different sections of groups/parties working for the poor. This dialogue should result in an alternative vision of a future and an alternative People's agenda. This alternative vision, if it becomes part of the struggle for Telangana then it may give really meaningful results. Also it is possible to envisage initiatives taken today by a large number of small groups, may prepare the people for a transition to an alternative future vision. It may also contribute to flesh-out the larger vision.

For one thing, the material basis of capitalism, concentrated form of energy in increasing quantities, like coal and petrol, is a thing of the past. There is no equivalent form of energy which can replace these. With that, today's high energy industrial society will also become a thing of the past. The alternative is scaling down the energy requirement in an equitable fashion and adopting regenerative energy sources like bio-energy and renewables like solar, wind and hydel power.

The 'model' of such a future society is still evolving. In general it will probably be composed of small regions self sufficient in food and water, federally related to other similar regions. As such Telangana has a logic. Its politic will have to be some form of a mix of socialism and anarchism and it will be arrived through years of transition. As of today, Cuba provides a transition model. □□□