

STATEHOOD DEBATE-I

On Self-Respect and Development of Telangana

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Succumbing to political pressures and for narrow considerations, the Union Government announced its willingness to concede Telangana State without ascertaining the opinions of the people of the entire State and declared starting of the process of formation of Separate Telangana. And this has given rise to an unprecedented, spontaneous popular upsurge in Andhra and Rayalaseema in support of Samaikya Andhra (United Andhra Pradesh) which still impacts, albeit in a subdued fashion. The decision to separate Telangana could be quite harmful to the general welfare of the Telugu people, and even Indians as a whole, as this will give further spurt to fissiparous tendencies all over the country, and already in several parts of Andhra Pradesh, the Separate Andhra, Rayalaseema and Uttarandhra demands are on the card and there is also a strong demand that Hyderabad (GHMC area) be made a Union Territory. This will be like breaking into pieces a beautiful painting just because some stray spots in it seem ugly. It is strange and sad that when the world over divided nations did, or are trying to, unite (two Germanys, two Vietnams, two Koreas, etc.), united Telugu nationality should get thus broken up. As such this author strongly advocates the unity of Telugu people and pleads for the continuance of the present unity with a change of name of the State and radical corrections to the historical mistakes that gave rise to regional tensions and animosities and for measures to promote regional autonomy and self-governance.

Actually, it was the 9 December 2009 statement of the Union Home Minister P Chidambaram that had brought a sea-change in the situation in Telangana. It was a virtual surrender to the threatening tactics of K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR). But all that was based on the false assurances given by different political parties, chiefly the Telugu Desam party, in the preceding All-Party meeting at Hyderabad that they would support any resolution for formation of separate Telangana. However, the deeply hurt and enraged popular sentiments in Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions in the wake of that statement and the huge spontaneous people's upsurge there in favour of the united State seem to have again tilted the balance with all parties deeply divided over the issue on Telangana, non-Telangana regional basis and this resulted in another 23 December statement by the Home Minister acknowledging some errors in making the 9/12 statement and calling for widespread consultations on the matter. Now another 5 January 2010 consultative meeting at Delhi has also taken place - this preceded by a mammoth popular outburst in Telangana in favour of separate Telangana, which also seems to have been aided by violent tactics and inflammatory slogans such as 'We'll hack those who say No to Telangana!', 'We'll cut their tongues!', 'Anybody opposing Telangana is sure to lose his life!', etc. The situation had turned quite volatile and seemed to be going out of hands of any reasonable peacetime administration. This is the usual course of any parochial movement which easily takes to violence and deadly

attacks against the opponents and tries to stifle democratic discussion and freedom of speech and expression in the name of popular support.

Later on certain measures have been taken by the state and central governments to some extent pacify the disturbed situation and a Srikrishna Committee to thoroughly go into the vexed question of separate Telangana or retention of unity of Andhra Pradesh and other ameliorative and remedial measures to be taken to improve the situation in Andhra Pradesh was constituted by the Union Government vide its decision dated 3 February 2010. This 'Committee for consultations on the situation in Andhra Pradesh' is chaired by Sri Justice B N Srikrishna, retired Supreme Court Judge, and consists of four other members : (i) Prof. (Dr.) Ranbir Singh, Vice-Chancellor, National Law University, Delhi; (ii) Dr. Abusaleh Shariff, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute, Delhi; (iii) Dr. (Ms.) Ravinder Kaur, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT, Delhi, and (iv) Shri Vinod K. Duggal, IAS (Retd.), Former Home Secretary, Member-Secretary. Specific terms of reference were entrusted to the Committee thus : (1) To examine the situation in the State of Andhra Pradesh with reference to the demand for a separate State for Telangana as well as the demand for maintaining the present status of a united Andhra Pradesh; (2) To review the developments in the State since its formation and their impact on the progress and development of the different regions of the State; (3) To examine the impact of the recent developments in the State on the different sections of the people such as women, children, minorities, other backward classes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. (4) To identify the key issues that must be addressed while considering the matters mentioned in items (1), (2) and (3) above; (5) To consult all sections of people, especially the political parties, on the aforesaid matters and elicit their views; to seek from the political parties and other organizations a range of solutions that would resolve the present difficult situation and promote the welfare of all sections of the people; to identify the optimal solutions for this purpose; and to recommend a plan of action and a road map. (6) To consult other organizations of civil society such as industry, trade, trade unions, farmers' organizations, women's organizations and students' organizations on the aforesaid matters and elicit their views with specific reference to the all round development of the different regions of the State. (7) To make any other suggestion or recommendation that the Committee may deem it appropriate. The Committee is expected to give its report by 31 December 2010, and Justice Srikrishna, famous for his impartial and scathing historic report on the Bombay communal riots in the wake of demolition of the Babri Masjid, has been repeatedly declaring that the Committee would complete its work well within the timeframe or even before that. The separatists, especially the Telangana Joint Action Committee led by Prof. Kodandaram and the Telangana Rashtra Samity (TRS) under KCR have castigated the very formation of the Committee and even threatened its boycott initially. However, as time went on, they seem to have mellowed down on this point and the TRS has even appeared before the Committee and presented a detailed report espousing its cause. But sadly, the TRS president continues to persist in his blackmailing tactics, this time threatening that Telangana would be plunged into a civil war, in case the Srikrishna Committee fails to endorse its separate statehood. And the Telangana JAC seems to be faithfully following in his footprints.

In this background, it is once again necessary to meet and refute the false arguments and schemes of the separatists and stress the historical and social importance of the idea and objective of unity in the context of development and prosperity of the Telugu people and their language and culture. All the contentions and schemes of the

separatists are here condensed under the two heads of 'Self-respect' and 'Development' grievances and the intricacies and ramifications of these two categories are sought to be explained in sufficient detail hereunder.

SELF RESPECT

Till recently the separatists mainly concentrated on the backwardness syndrome - that due to 'colonial exploitation' by the Andhra 'settlers' or 'colonialists' or 'capitalists', most of Telangana region remained backward, with industries and job opportunities almost non-existent and the plums being snatched by the 'Andhra' settlers in Telangana. Whatever might be the iota or proportion of truth in such allegations before 1969, that is, in the situation at the time of outburst of the first Separate Telangana movement, the four decades of development scenario in Andhra Pradesh subsequently presented a different picture and substantially negated all such allegations. It has been incontrovertibly established, even according to an analysis of the statistics reeled out and tables presented by the separatists themselves, that Telangana has developed fast, at a much faster rate than Kosta Andhra and Rayalaseema, as compared to its very backward position in 1956 - which was mainly due to the atrocious Nizam rule. So now the main point being raised by the separatists is no longer the backwardness grievance but that of the hurt and damage to the self-respect of Telangana, by the supercilious conduct of the Andhra rulers who dominate the political power and also bureaucracy and even cultural belittling in the entertainment industries, etc. The very word and utterance 'Andhra' is generally taken as derogating the self-respect and dignity of Telanganites and they - separatists - declare that a point of no return has been reached and they could no longer co-exist with the arrogantly conducting Andhra people.

For one thing hecklers and supercilious natured persons exist on both sides of the border, so to put it. In any society such scum is an unavoidable evil. One has to mainly look towards the dominant features and only then Telangana people would find their prejudices not based on ground realities.

First of all, Andhra is the generic 'race' or 'tribe' name of Telugu people and perhaps even antedates the very language name (i.e. Telugu). Even in Mahabharata Andhras are referred to and occasionally in Valmiki Ramayana also (in Kishkinda Kanda). Then come the Satavahanas who are called Andhrabhrityas, which term may mean either Servants of Andhras or Andhra Servants. In the latter case the mighty Satavahanas themselves may be taken as of Andhra origin and in the former case they are to be treated as once upon a time servants or vassals of some mighty Andhra kings. Either way the antiquity of Andhras is established. The original (first) capital of Satavahanas is said to fall in the present day Telangana (at Kotilingala) though later it was to be Prathishthanapura (Paithan) in Maharashtra which became more famous as the capital of Satavahanas, and still later at Dharanikota, in the Guntur district. Then Kakatiyas who are of mainly Telangana origin or naturalization, are also famous under the title 'Andhra Deshadheeswaras' (paramount rulers of Andhra country). Moreover there has been extensive intermingling of people of different regions of the now Andhra Pradesh, mainly of Telangana and Andhra regions, during and after the Kakatiya Rule. For example, Ganapati Deva, the most powerful Kakatiya emperor, married his elder daughter Rudramadevi (who after him became the mighty reigning queen of Warangal Kakatiya Empire) to Veerabhadra, the Vengi Chalukya king from Nidadavolu (in Andhra region); married his second daughter Ganapamba to Betaraju, king of Dharanikota (Guntur district). Ganapati Deva himself married the two sisters of Jayapa Senani of Kammanadu (mostly the present Krishna-Guntur-Prakasam district zone). Likewise any

number of instances of intermingling can be given. More recently, the example of the ace separatist leader Kalvakuntla Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) itself will suffice to point out and prove this intermingling. KCR is said to hail from Padmanayaka Velama community who belonged originally to Bobbili, Vizianagaram district (in North Andhra - Uttarandhra). Many from that community migrated to other regions and some of them to Telangana about 4-5 generations back or still earlier. KCR's ancestors are also such migrants from Bobbili area and KCR himself acknowledged this and proudly described himself as 'Bobbili Bebbuli' (Tiger of Bobbili) during his election speeches supporting the candidate he set up there under TRS banner in 2004 elections. Not only he, but several prominent Velamas of Telangana, like ex-CM Jalagam Vengal Rao, Chennamaneni Rajeswara Rao of Sircilla, MSR Satyanarayana Rao of Karimnagar, et al hail from such migrant Velama families of Andhra. Such intermingling is prevalent among other castes of Telangana -Padmashali, Kuruma, Golla, etc. also.

Another interesting point is that Ms Kalvakuntla Kavitha, daughter of the separatist leader KCR and herself top woman leader of that separatist organization Telangana Rashtra Samiti, had under the banner of 'Telugu Jagruti' (Telugu Awareness) published two volumes of a book on people's movement in Telangana against Nizam's autocratic rule by one Jitendra Babu, Advocate, which contains numerous documents relating to the Andhra Janasangham, Andhra Mahasabha, etc., which brought cultural renaissance to Telugu people in Telangana during Nizam rule and inspired and organized them to fight a glorious struggle against feudalism and communal monarchy. The entire book is a compendium on the Andhrodyamam (Andhra movement) in Nizam Telangana and whatever be the unwise and parochial sentiments and comments in the preface and foreword, etc., the main documents themselves show that all the Telugu people of Telangana took great pride in their Andhra identity and also desired the unity and support of all the Telugus (mukkoti Andhrulu) in both the Nizam Telangana and British Andhra regions.

Another important point is that the origin of the word Telugu which is the mother tongue of Telanganites and Andhras both and the official language of the State is not clear but is generally explained in two ways. One relating to the way in which yet other tribes or peoples of the way view them. For e.g. Telugu is interpreted as Ten + Agu = South towards; obviously the people to the North of Telugu speaking people should have used this term and gradually it might have become popular that way. This could be so because the Telugu speaking Kammas or Naidus of Tamil Nadu are to this day referred to as Vadugars (people of the North) because for them Telugu speaking people's area is to the North. The second interpretation is that it is the language of the people belonging to Trilinga Desa, meaning territory in between the holy Saivite shrines of Srisailam, Draksharamam and Kaleswaram. This is the general belief in the minds of many including Konda Venkata Ranga Reddy, who can be said to be the Grandfather of Separate Telangana movement. These are the starting sentences in his autobiography:

"Srisailam in Kurnool district, Draksharamam of East Godavari district and Kaleswaram of Karimnagar district are the three great Shaivite places. The region within these three lingas was traditionally known as Trilingadesam "Ane", meaning country or region. Trilingadesam came to be known as Trilinganamu, and then, over the course of time, as Telanganamu.* Thus in due course it became Telangana, and its language came to be known as 'Telangi'** by the Nizam government. The region came to be known as Telangana. Marathwada and Karnataka were the other two regions of the Nizam State."

Even by this token it is clear that the original Trilinga Desa comprised of the unity of all the [existing] three regions-Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana.

The Satavahanas of the yore (BC) and later Kakatiyas of 12th to 14th centuries ruled roughly the present entire Andhra Pradesh region as a united entity. Later Vijayanagara empire consisted of some parts of Telangana also in it. Kuli Kutubshahis first and Nizam nawabs next exercised sway over the entire Telugu region, the latter up to the 1750's. It was for their own military protection that the Nizam Nawaabs entrusted the territories of Coastal Andhra (Sarkars) first and later the Ceded Districts (Rayalaseema) to the British and as such from 1760s and 1800's those two regions developed as part of British India and because of the more democratic and progressive set up under the British as compared to the dark autocratic communal rule of the Nizam, those two areas relatively prospered in education, agriculture, Public health and general development in all fields while Telangana as part of Hyderabad State was left to groan under horrible feudal repression and misery. So one finds the Nizam, when immediately after independence he declared his wish to become independent sovereign State ruler, demanding return of the Coastal Andhra, Ceded Districts and Berar provinces to him and yearning for the formation of a greater Osmanistan.

The separatists do not shirk to utter several falsehoods to incite the people and one of those is their blind and bland statement that whenever Telangana people went to Andhra regions in some time of distress they were looked down, heckled and poorly treated. Nothing can be farther from truth than this baseless allegation. The Convener of the Telugu Unity National Forum had several years back extensively interviewed several freedom fighters of Telangana—the intrepid fighters in the great Telangana peasants armed struggle that shook the Nizam monarchy to its foundations—and he pointedly asked them about the treatment meted out to them by the Andhra people when they took refuge in Andhra or went there for any assistance. All of them in one voice acknowledged the cordiality and friendship with which they were treated and angrily denied allegations of any mistreatment. For example Kasani Narayana acknowledged that the marching song of the then Telangana fighters—"Telugu talli biddalam, Telangana veerulam, Matrudesha mukti koraku porusalpa kadilinaam"—was written by Sunkara Satyanarayana (great communist writer and fighter from Krishna district, Adhra). Here itself it may be mentioned that it is the same Sunkara Satyanarayana who wrote the magnificent and extremely popular play 'Maa Bhoorm' (Our Land) which inspired millions of people (mainly in Telangana but also in Andhra) into anti-feudal democratic struggles and its players in the theatre—the Praja Natya Mandali troupe — was unique in India and contained mainly of artists from Andhra region who toured, and inspired people, in all regions and it was this troupe which in course proved to be the richest source for a crop of top cine stars (Gummadi, Savitri, G. Varalakshmi, Allu Ramalingaiah, even NTR to an extent, et al). [According to KA Abbas it is a world record for *Maa Bhumi* to be performed by 125 groups and to have completed 1000 performances within one year in 1947 and as per Mikkilineni around 20 lakh people watched 'Maa Bhumi'] Nalla Narasimhulu narrated how a Guntur Reddy played a key role in organizing them into Andhra Mahasabha. K. Krishnamurthy, another Telangana armed struggle veteran spoke about their pleasant experiences in Andhra area and says Andhra activists were always very considerate and respectful towards them. Kodati Narayana Rao, an active anti-Nizam fighter and Congress leader, speaks of organizing a relief camp at Repala (Munagala Paragana, then in Krishna district) for aid to Telangana refugees and fighters and also categorically states: "I was always for the unity of the Telugu-speaking people and ardently supported the Vishalandhra slogan and the

movement. I was opposed to the separate Telangana movements at that time (1955-56) and later (1968-69) and am even now opposed to that slogan." [See: In Retrospect, Vol. 5-Part I, Ravi Sasi Enterprises, Hyderabad, 2002, pp. 46, 124,499, 561-63]. It is well known that a number of relief camps were organized in Munagala paraganas as also in other parts of Andhra to help Telangana refugees and fighters in those days.

As such the cry of loss of self-respect and hurt to collective dignity of Telangana, etc. is an imaginary grievance, to say the least. History proves rather the other way that Telangana's main feature of self-respect was its identity and coexistence with the term, and people, of Andhra.

Another important complaint of the separatists is that due to 'colonial' exploitation by Andhras, the Telangana region has suffered backwardness for all these decades and is meagrely developed in comparison to the coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions. They cite absolute figures and percentages and the steep or shallow differences in those statistics relating to Telangana and other regions in support of their contentions but never trace the historical development of the development. In all important development indicators the Telangana region has fared extremely well over the five decades since the formation of the United State as compared to the other two regions of the State and in fact the rate of development here in Telangana is quite higher than that in other regions. That is largely due to the abysmally low development and stark poverty of the region during the atrocious Nizam rule of about 200 years.

Telangana of the 21st Century is not at all backward but has grown very fast—faster than the other two regions of Andhra Pradesh, given its very low development base in 1956. It has been already stated that the separatists also realize this truth now though they would not reveal it in so many words but would hide and suppress it and only project any vestiges of backwardness by blowing those out of proportion and hence they are now taking recourse to the slogans of self-respect and separate cultural identity, etc.

REGIONAL AUTONOMY AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

A regional councils system, approximating to the powers and jurisdictions of a powerful upper house, can be a way out. Regional Councils should be established for every region and they be empowered to present regional budgets which would be the basis on which State Budget has to be finally formulated, of course with the necessary alterations and corrections. These regional councils should have the necessary authority to back up their suggestions and directions, and the State Government ought to be loathe to intervene against their decisions and action in the interest of the rightful claims and interests of the people of the region, except in case of acute emergency or patent injustice occurring. The regional councils can take the place of the present Legislative Council which can be abolished and the members of regional councils will be elected in a like manner as the MLCs are, and any specific bar set up by a regional council to initiate or carry on any measure which it considers detrimental to the interests of the particular region on specifically enumerated topics should not be normally transgressed by the State Legislature except by a two-thirds majority and that too in the first instance remanding back the matter to the said regional council for reconsideration and the final decision can only be taken on the second sending of regional council's resolution on that matter, amended or not as the case may be, and again requiring two-thirds majority in case the Assembly persists in rejecting the resolution. Many other matters of detail can be worked out and it should be remembered that American Senate is considered more powerful or not less powerful than the American Congress.

DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The other important point to be stressed is that geographical and climatic conditions and peculiarities of different regions have to be carefully considered and the development policies should accordingly be formulated instead of trying to concentrate on general big projects and heavy industries development model based on the current LPG economy syndrome. There has been much criticism that the prestigious and stupendous 'Jalayagnam' project in Andhra Pradesh has turned into a nauseating 'Dhanayagnam' project for the corrupt politicians and inept contractors. Telangana is in general a plateau land sometimes even to the height of 300-400 metres above the sea level and at the minimum of about 150 metres above sea level. The adage "Neeru pallamerugu" (Water knows flowing to lower depths) has to be borne in mind and to dream or insist on canal irrigation in such a land is sheer stupidity which would entail thousands or lakhs of crores of wasteful expenditures even for initiation of no-water canals construction even. Tanks and wells are the better and more suitable alternative and the ground water tables have to be adequately maintained. The ground water recharge mechanisms have to be installed and all sorts of overuse of ground water have to be curbed. Right watershed and water management policies in the medium and minor irrigation sector are the viable solution for better agricultural development here. However, one finds tanks here have been to a large extent destroyed or utterly neglected and the traditional dug-wells giving rise to ubiquitous tube-wells thereby necessitating great amounts of energy, primarily electricity, and also entailing steep fall of ground water tables. Instead of focusing on this aspect and improving the minor and medium irrigation sector and adopting right water management policies, the big project syndrome is being replicated here with grand lift irrigation schemes like Pranahita and Chevella, and even a demand is being made that they be taken up as national projects so that the burden could be shouldered by all Indians. An experienced engineer from Telangana has revealed that all such efforts to copy the irrigation systems existent in delta areas would rebound to great loss and tragedy of the plateau regions, in this case Telangana, and this year one finds no or meager waters either in Godavari or Krishna rivers. He further states that the coal reserves of Telangana are getting fast depleted and in that background it would be well-nigh impossible for generation of requisite electricity to operate any lift irrigation schemes for drawing out Godavari waters for irrigation in the uplands of Telangana; that all these Jalayagnam projects are only there to enrich the coffers of corrupt contractors and ruling party politicians; and that as on today only about 16% of the GDP comes from agriculture and the rest of 84% from other sectors. As such the development model should be suitably changed to concentrate more on appropriate industrialization which could generate more employment and promote the economy and not on these white elephants of unworkable big projects. All this is but a game of the greedy political leaders bent on promoting their own selfish interests.

UNITY

The United State of Andhra Pradesh need not be and should not be broken up to any number of pieces but must be continued and taken forward towards more equitable and balanced development of its people and its different regions. This writer as Convener have-taken the initiative to form an informal association with some progressive democratic and socialist minded natives and longstanding residents of Telangana named the TELUGU NATIONAL UNITY FORUM (Telugu Jati Aikyata Vedita) and on its behalf presented a detailed memorandum to the Srikrishna Committee with most of the particulars narrated above supplemented by several supporting documents and strongly pleaded for the cause of retention of unity of the state of Andhra Pradesh.

* This is one interpretation. However, Brown differs and he says Telugu or Tenugu literally means "the language of the South" and comments some wrongly derive it from 'Trilinga'. Ten in root Dravidian as also the present Tamil means South but in accha Telugu it means direction (dikku). Brown also quotes some scholar saying there are five species of Telugu and it would be instructive to find what these five species are. Ten + agu = Tenagu or Tenugu -> Telugu. - IMS.

** During Nizam period, especially before the Andhra renaissance in Telangana, Muslims and more so Marathis used to heckle and look down Telugu speaking people saying 'Telangi bedhangi' i.e. 'Telugu without proper pattern/manner'. And we know it was one such heckling at an eminent Telugu lawyer at a meeting in Vivek Vardhini College grounds in 1921 by Marathis which led to the formation of Andhra Jana Sangham.