

## *What It's All About*

The best way to solve a problem is not to solve it at all. This has been the Congress policy since the days of Nehru. There is no need for idealism if the only time it is applied is when it doesn't matter. Then the Nehruvian dynasty is in crisis as the Congress empire is crumbling. And Rahul Gandhi's 'peasant march' in Uttar Pradesh can hardly reverse the trend of aging and decay which is as natural as anything else for this Gandhi enterprise. Peasant march or no march, in 2009, 17,638 farmers killed themselves—an average of one every 30 minutes. There is no reason to believe that things would be better after Rahul Gandhi's foot march which is basically aimed at influencing the forthcoming assembly poll in Uttar Pradesh. In truth rural India can now boast of producing the largest recorded wave of suicides in human history.

The grand old party is not yet over but it has long lost its national status. It is now threatened by its own ranks because too many middle class aspirants are fighting to loot exchequer at state level. They think their world has to be this way as all of them want their own fiefdom with exclusive right to siphon revenue. Coopting regional satraps which has long been the ploy of Congress to pacify dissidence since the fifties, is not working. Also, the idea of alliance with regional crusaders while allowing them enough leverage in managing local exchequer in exchange of accepting Congress monopoly at the Centre sometimes fail to produce assured results.

Congress stalwarts are spending sleepless nights over the renewed Telangana statehood agitation. Having failed to tame the Telangana tide Congress at one stage began to talk in multiple voices with the objective of appeasing all and in the end didn't succeed to please anyone—pro-Telangana or anti-Telangana. Most political parties are just reacting to spontaneity—they have no clear-cut policy on separate state-hood issue in Telangana and elsewhere as well. What matters in their calculation is opportunism and marriage of convenience.

Not that smaller states created earlier by slicing the bigger ones—Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh—are doing well. Nor are their people better off in terms of per capita income, gender equality and relevance in national politics. Behind the statehood demand the point at issue is unequal development—or lack of it. Regional disparities in some areas have reached such a stage that the rapidly growing middleclass, despite having common cultural and linguistic heritage, cannot think of furthering their class interests under any dispensation other than a state of their own. They have no idea about how to perfect structural imbalance, left by history, to the satisfaction of all. No political party has ever demanded a second States Reorganisation Committee to rectify the loopholes left untouched by the first committee. All of them resort to ad hoc-ism to buy peace in the short-run. Long-term perspective is not on their agenda. No doubt even if they announce a time-frame for the creation of Telangana which is the principal demand of the agitationists, it will aggravate the crisis within the Congress party itself while detonating a chain reaction in other regions where separate statehood movement is quite at advanced stage and ripe.

Because of Telangana imbroglio judicial activism that has generated new hopes for the oppressed in tribal Chattisgarh is getting less attention, albeit the apex court's judgement declaring 'Salwa Judum' unconstitutional is, no doubt, historic for more than one reason. By continually offering an excuse to combat maoist insurgency the state began to engage non-state actors in a big way in what they call conflict zone in the Dantewada region of

Chattisgarh. The Supreme Court has now confirmed what human rights bodies have long been talking about—the central and state governments are waging war against their own people. Ordinary people are their enemies, not Pakistan and China.

‘Salwa Judum’ is a variant of death squad *a la*, Latin America. It’s an armed civilian vigilante group enjoying state patronage. The creation of SPOs (Special Police Officers) has no legal sanction—it is just pitting one section of tribals against another while using the so-called SPOs as cannon fodder. So says the Supreme Court. But the persons in power are reluctant to heed any attention to the court’s ruling.

‘Salwa Judum’ means brutality, murder, arson and mass incarceration as well. The same is true of ‘Harmad’ created by the erstwhile marxist regime of Bengal. Then the issue of political prisoners, maoist prisoners to be precise, is hotting up in Bengal. As for maoist prisoners in Bengal and Chattishgarh it is about locking up a whole section of society—especially tribals, backward community people and urban progressives—to whom this system offers no future. Prisons are specially built to degrade, dehumanise and break people. It’s a British legacy that continues unabated. And for decades now, there hasn’t even been the pretense of Indian jails being about ‘correction’ and ‘rehabilitation’. Political prisoners are an invisible and dehumanised minority within the larger population of prison inmates in general.

With a crisis situation prevailing in almost every sphere of social-life, Congress is simply no answer to the emerging India that lives at many levels. It can no longer set the terms for what is to be done in the aging era. □□□