

MIM, Muslims and Telangana: A Roundabout Journey

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Organized Riots: The Muslims and Hindus of the Old City have been subjected to what seems to be contrived communal riots initiated in order to destabilize Congress Chief Ministers – usually by Congress faction leaders. The “usual” riots, which were an instinctive response to a rumor or trivial incident, usually die down within a day or two without much damage or loss of life. But these “engineered” riots are seen to have a hidden agenda, are much more violent, continue longer and lead to extensive loss of life and property.

The first such instance was in 1989 when Hyderabad saw its worst communal riots, which were triggered after Dr. Marri Chenna Reddy took over as Congress Chief Minister. These riots were widely rumoured and believed to be an attempt of a powerful Rayalaseema faction in the Congress, which wanted to see its leader as Chief Minister instead. In fact there is a long and persistence tendency in Rayalaseema – far outdating Naxalism- in a almost senseless violence based on a medieval clash of egos, family feuds and economic and political interests. This has now invaded not only the political world of the region of its birth but spread to other parts as well and impacted the popular imagination.

The recent 2010 riots are another illustration of how communal riots can seemingly be manufactured to order. In March that year, a communal clash occurred in the Old City in response to the removal of green flags (strung for a Muslim festival) and their subsequent replacement by saffron flags on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Ram Navmi.

The media reported that at a meeting held by Home Minister Sabita Indra Reddy with City MLAs, MIM MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi spoke out that the clashes were engineered to bring down the Congress Chief Minister K. Rosaiah’s regime. Similar views were echoed by Congress Rajya Sabha MP V Hanumanth Rao and Nizamabad Congress Lok Sabha MP Madhu Yashki.

The City Police Commissioner AK Khan was quoted as having described the clashes in the Old City as an ‘organized attempt’ by some persons which would be probed by the Special Investigation Team (SIT). Briefing media about the clashes, Khan said, “It looks like some persons incited the violence deliberately.

More interestingly the media asked: “But is there a similarity of purpose between now and 1989? Riots were triggered in 1989 after Marri Chenna Reddy took over as chief minister, frustrating the attempts of another powerful faction in the Congress, which wanted to see its leader in the gaddi”.

The Telangana leaders also put their spin on it. Nizamabad MP and Congress leader Madhu Yashki Goud claimed that the same forces, which had fomented trouble in 1989 to dislodge Chenna Reddy, were responsible for the 2010 riots. He is quoted as saying:

“ Violence broke out at eight places. All the incidents were pre-meditated. They are engineered to bring down Chief Minister K Rosaiah’s government.’ Yashki also alleged that leaders of Andhra and Rayalaseema regions saw the riots as serving their twin objectives of Rosaiah’s exit and Telangana movement’s end.”

Other Telangana leaders such as Cantonment Congress Dalit MLA P. Sankar Rao were quoted as supporting the contention: “ ‘This seems to be a repeat of 1989. This is a conspiracy against Rosaiah. Party president Sonia Gandhi is being briefed by the IB’. It was further reported that when Rosaiah held a meeting with city MLAs and police officials, MIM floor leader in the Assembly MIM Akbaruddin Owaisi expressed the same views. However, BJP suspected the hand of MIM”.

Thus the riots in the Old City of 1989 were clearly seen in retrospect as attempts to destabilize a (Telengana) Chief Minister who was selected by the Congress Party High Command in preference to a Rayalaseema faction leader. The 2010 riots were seen not only as a repeat performance – the modus operandi and the Congress opposition faction being the same - to remove a Chief Minister (this time from Costal Andhra) who has been selected by the High Command over the open demands of the Rayalaseema faction led by Y.S Jaganmohan Reddy – son of the late Chief Minister Y.S.Rajasekhar Reddy and also to derail the Telengana statehood movement which the Government of India had blessed on 9th December 2009.

If these types of reports found their way into the mass media, it can well be imagined how much more were the fears and anxieties of Muslim and Hindu “street” in the Old City. The issue of Telangana needs to be seen in the context of potential for communal violence. The Muslim notion of victim-hood, which took birth and grew since the dissolution of the Nizam’s rule in 1948 has allowed politicians to play on it for electoral and other gains for decades.

Hyderabad’s Growth leaves Muslims behind?

In 2007, the Congress government of Y. S. Rajasekhar Reddy formed the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) covering 626 square kilometers by merging the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad - which covered only 175 square kilometers - with 12 outlying municipalities.

As a result, as Sri Krishna Committee (SKC) Report says: “The expansion of GHMC has led to a sharp decline in vote share for MIM from 29% to 14% and an equivalent increase for the TDP and also the Congress”. This too would have had its effect on the usual apprehensions of 41 per cent of the State’s Muslims who live in Hyderabad and which elected 43 corporators, seven MLA’s, two MLC’s and one MP from Hyderabad and none from the rest of the state. This would indicate that the MIM electoral base was located in the Old City.

While Hyderabad has shown tremendous growth and change there was inevitably a down side to it. As the SKC said: “It is critical to note that the share of modern services in Hyderabad’s economy has increased from 24% to 39% in a relatively short period of time.

Most of this increase is offset by decreases across the board, but most significantly in the share of manufacturing (-6%), transport and public services (-4% each)".

The Muslim population got affected badly in the changing scenario: "One striking aspect of this difference is with respect to Muslims. As compared to the rest of the city, the Muslims have been less in modern and public services and more in traditional services and manufacturing, as seen in Table 6.3. Moreover, over time, this difference is becoming sharper, as they are participating much less in the transition to modern services. While the decline in the share of public employment is common across the city, the Muslims seem to be moving more towards manufacturing and construction while the non-Muslims are moving towards modern services, as seen in Figure 6.3B. Taken to an extreme, this may have social repercussions, as they may feel excluded if the policies of the city become oriented more towards a service city, rather than a manufacturing city".

But SKC also admitted that: "The Muslims in Telangana, contrary to common belief, are doing well on consumption improvement (by 76%) and poverty reduction levels (by 33 points)". The reality and perception of the Muslim condition seems to be mixed up thoroughly and need closer study.

MIM Position on Telangana

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM or MIM), the leading party claims to represent the interests of all the Muslim of Andhra Pradesh. Its strength, however, is largely in Hyderabad and that too in the Old City where concentration of Muslim population lives. Its leaders, the sons of its founder, Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, usually state its position.

The party spokesman, Akbar Owaisi, the younger son of the founder, has stated, in late 2006, its view on Telangana history. Thus:

"The state had witnessed two violent agitations—firstly in Telangana region during 1969-71 and secondly in Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema region in 1972-73—which claimed scores of innocent lives and led to untold repression on the people by the security forces. It may be recalled that Telangana Praja Samithi swept the Lok Sabha polls in Telangana in 1971 and Shri Satyanarayana Rao was among the 10 MPs elected on TPS banner out of the 14 in the region. The TPS contested the polls on the plank of separate Telangana state. Subsequently, Congress leaders in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, seeking separate Andhra state, spearheaded the Jai Andhra movement. During both these violent agitations, the AIMIM adopted a clear-cut stand against bifurcation of the state.

The AIMIM stood for an integrated Andhra Pradesh, much before the votaries of separate Telangana merged the Telangana Praja Samithi back into the Congress and the Jai Andhra protagonists had no qualms in rejoining the Congress. It was the AIMIM's stand that was vindicated by the developments that followed both these separatist agitations."

In keeping with its position, the MIM made the following submission to the SKC:

"In their detailed memorandum submitted to the Committee and during an extensive meeting held with the Committee, the President and the senior office bearers of AIMIM

strongly advocated the cause of united Andhra Pradesh underlining that it was in the best interest of not only the state's economic growth, but also the well-being of the minority Muslim community. Although the influence of the party is generally limited to the city of Hyderabad, it does have district offices spread all over the state. The delegation also voiced the opinion that in case the Committee recommends division of the state then it would be in the interest of the minority community to form a new state combining the Telangana and Rayalaseema regions into Rayala-Telangana state. If, however, neither of the above two desirable options are found feasible and formation of Telangana (without Rayalaseema) becomes inevitable, then Hyderabad should be part of Telangana and should not be given any other status"

The argument of creating Rayala-Telangana is possibly based on the demographic composition of Rayalaseema. It has over 12% Muslim population, as compared to just above 8% in the rest of Telangana and the MIM may believe that it will be able to extend its influence beyond the city of Hyderabad in a Rayala-Telangana state."

Thus according to the SKC, MIM's first option was a united state, despite the reservation expressed by it to the Government over Telengana rights being violated. The second option is the curious Rayala-Telenagana formation that does not make any sense except for the greater Muslim population and, finally, if none of these work, Telengana with Hyderabad as its capital.

Communal Implications of Telangana

Much thought unsaid has gone into the communal implications of Telangana statehood but these were revealed unexpectedly in the extracts of the Secret Note of Chapter 8 of the SKC report as revealed in the High Court Judgment of 23rd March 2011. It quoted extracts from the SKC's Secret Note, on Muslims :

"...There is a certain sense of mutual suspicion between two communities who are living in the above mentioned areas. If communal passions become an additional factor in an atmosphere where unemployment, social unrest, etc. exist, it may give rise to birth of militant, Jihadi elements..."

And as regards Hindus that:

"Telangana has large number of Muslim pockets and to counter Muslim influence, Hindu fundamentalists may compete with them and try to polarize the Hindu population..."

On communal violence, SKC has this to say:

"As the State has, by and large, been able to neutralize most of the Jihadi elements in the last two decades and has evolved a suitable mechanisms to contain communal and factional resistance, there may not be much change on the position on these two fronts. The status quo may remain. Since the alignment of political forces on communal lines is likely to be less probable, the outbreak of communal violence would be contingent upon extraneous factors".

Thus the Secret Note to Chapter 8 of the SKC adds further dimensions to the communal angle without going into the background of communal riots that took place in March 2010 while the SKC was active but took no cognizance of these extraordinary events.

This is surprising and is seemingly deliberate and has raised doubts about its capacity for balance and fairness

The High Court judgment itself comments: "Option No.3 in the report was about merger of Rayalaseema with Telangana. In the main report, almost a rosy picture was painted about it, even while expressing the view that no political party may agree for that course. In the (secret) report, however, the Committee has this to say, 'Since the BJP has a strong presence; it may try to consolidate in Telangana area and further extend its base. AIMIM may try to expand in Rayalaseema regions resulting in birth of militant communalism in certain pockets' ".

Now with all this now in the open what was to be the MIM position on Telengana? For, by this time the activist Seemandhra capitalist-cum-politicians realized that they could no longer hold Telengana but wanted a "solution" to their vested interest in Hyderabad, which seemed to be a Union Territory status for Hyderabad.

After playing it as flexibly as he could, finally on July 11, 2011, Asaduddin Owaisi declared: "We will not allow Hyderabad to be a Union Territory. The MIM, in principle is not in favour of bifurcation of the state but if it is done, then Hyderabad should be the capital of Telangana. Can Telangana survive without Hyderabad?" Good rehtorical question!

Conclusion

The MIM and the Owaisi's have reflected the electoral will of Muslims in Hyderabad and have claimed to speak for Muslims all over the state. As for the Muslims in Seemaandhra, they seem quite capable of taking care of themselves without MIM assistance - as they have for a hudred odd years before the Andhra merger with Telangana without much trouble. The Telangana Muslims, heirs to the long traditions of the Nizam's state, may find it safer and easier to deal with their age old neighbours - the Telangana Hindus.

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