

SENSE AND CONSENSUS: LESSONS FROM HISTORY

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Anyone who had a ringside seat during the tumultuous event of 1972-73 in Andhra Pradesh knows the sequence of events that took place at that time. But that was a generation ago and much dirty water has flowed down the Musi heading for the Krishna Delta.

The Telengana agitation of 1969 –71 led into the General Election of 1971. The Telengana Praja Samithi (TPS) contested the election on the single issue of a separate state for Telengana and defeated the Congress Party - the only other political force in the region - and secured 10 of the 14 parliamentary seats to the TPS. The will of the Telangana people was clearly expressed.

Subsequently at the persuasion of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the TPS merged with the Congress and P V Narasimha Rao was made Chief Minister in mid-1971 with a Cabinet of 28 ministers of which 18 were from the Andhra region as also a Deputy Chief Minister Sri B V Subba Reddy, from Rayalaseema.

The PV Government then proceeded to reduce the agricultural land ceiling to 12 acres of irrigated land by an Ordinance on 2nd May 1972 and followed it up by Assembly passing the Land Ceiling Act on 15th September, 1972 This sparked off a tidal wave of anger in the Coastal Andhra region from the kulaks – formerly with the Communist Party but now all bourgeois capitalist farmers in the Congress.

But with the success of the Bangladesh War, two-thirds majority in the Assembly and more importantly two-thirds also in the Lok Sabha, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the virtual “Empress of India”. The Coastal Andhra kulak-politicians had little choice but to disguise the cause of their opposition to the land reform and the P. V. Narasimha Rao government

The State Assembly election of 1972 saw the Congress Party under PV get a, 80% majority in the House (219 out of the 270 seats) and this enabled the introduction of drastic land reforms to be implemented despite kulak vested interest in the Party.

As the British academic and former MP, Hugh Gray wrote: “The Kamma landlords of the Coastal districts were among the dominant agricultural castes incensed by P V Narasimha Rao’s reforming zeal. The Kamma caste had lost in power to the ubiquitous Reddis when Andhra Pradesh was formed, as there were no Kammas in the Telangana. Kammas such as Professor Ranga (then in the Swatantra Party), had been among the first to support the demand for a separate Telengana in 1969 and they were now joined by many others in discussing the desirability of a separating Telangana and Andhra.”

This chance for the Andhra politicians and kulak farmers came soon enough in October 3, 1972, when the Supreme Court upheld the Constitutional validity of the Mulki Rules of the Nizam's Government giving protection in government jobs to residents of Telengana.

This was the occasion for the Jai Andhra agitation for a separate Andhra state, which reached its peak in December 1972, with Andhra separatist flags on public buildings and offices in Vijaywada and Guntur and spreading to the other districts. Roads were blocked, police firing on agitators resulted in deaths, telephone and railway and road links were snapped.

The DyCM and nine other Andhra ministers (out of 18 Andhra Ministers) resigned during December 1972. Kakani Vekatarathnam, the popular Kamma leader, died on Christmas Day, 1972 and nearly 5 lakhs mourners turned up for his funeral with the CRP and police withdrawn to facilitate the occasion.

Fearing a unanimous resolution in favor of bifurcation in the APCC and also in the Assembly due to meet shortly, the High Command dissolved the APCC on 11th January 1973 and appointed an Ad Hoc Committee. On January 12th, another eight ministers were sworn in.

Under High Command's instructions, the Ad Hoc Committee asked the CM to resign on 16th January and he followed orders on 17th January 1973. Following this, President's Rule was proclaimed on 18th January in the State - where Congress Party had two-thirds majority in the Assembly!! On January 23rd 1973, 114 Congressmen from Andhra handed in their resignations from the Party to B. V. Subba Reddy and the Andhra Congress Action Committee sent an ultimatum to the Center to concede separation by February 5th, 1973

By January 1973 it was clear that the entire polity – both in Andhra and Telangana – were in favor of bifurcation. Thus consensus was at last achieved and an amicable solution possible. But the High Command was not in favor.

As Hugh Gray says: “ It is difficult to know why the demand for a separate Andhra failed, leaving aside the prime Minister's firm decision not to concede it... Although expressed more efficiently and forcibly, the demand for a speared Andhra never had the same emotional drive as the demand for separate Telangana”.

Again in 2006, in the wake of another renewal of the Telangana statehood agitation, the Coastal Andhra leaders met in Vijaywada on the 34th anniversary of Kakani Venkatratnam's death on 25th December. The meeting included Kavuri Sambasiva Rao (Congress MP from Eluru), Pinnamaneni Koteswara Rao (former Zilla Parishad chairman and father of Higher Education Minister P Venkateswara Rao), Vasantha Nageswara Rao (AP State Cooperative Bank chairman), Chanumolu Venkata Rao (legislator and former minister), Paladugu Venkat Rao (former minister), Ch V P Murthy Raju (former minister), Kadiyala Raghava Rao (former ZP chairman), Karnati Ramamohana Rao (eminent advocate) and Yalamanchili Sivaji and Yarlagadda Lakshmi Prasad (former TDP MPs).

“In the wake of a strong sentiment prevailing in Telangana region for a separate state, they felt that the time is ripe for bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into two separate states -- Telangana and Andhra -- without any rancour”.

Reacting to the Vijayawada meeting, Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president K Keshava Rao is reported to have said: “There was nothing wrong with the demand by Coastal leaders for separate Andhra state when a similar demand was made for separate Telangana state.”

TRS president Chandrasekhar Rao is said to have welcomed the call for separate Andhra, saying: "There is no need for rancour. People of Telangana and Andhra should respect each other even during the process of separation," he said

At least after the recent consensus on Telangana separation on 6th December 2009 by an All - Party meeting and a unanimous resolution of the Congress Legislature Party, the High Command and Government took into consideration in making the declaration for Telangana statehood on 9thDecember 2009.

Thus it will be seen that every time – 1973, 2006 and 2009 - when there was consensus, the High Command chose to ignore it and act against it. It is about time this extraordinary consensus over the last 37 years at least is implemented without any vested interests coming in the way.

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