

State On The Edge

By Gautam Pingle

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Andhra Pradesh is on the edge. The question is on the edge of what? Of an abyss or an edge of the new chapter in its history?

The Telangana movement has made its point – quietly, firmly and patiently – and it is not going to change, come what may. The election of 2009 has resulted in 90% of the AP voters casting their votes for parties espousing and promising a Telangana state. Apart for the CPM and the Majlis-e-Ittehadul, all other parties promised de-merger of the state.

On December 6th 2009, the parties and the Congress Legislature Party reasserted their resolve to grant statehood for Telangana. On December 9th, the Union Government having deliberated in the Core Group and full Cabinet and with the consent of the UPA Chairperson Mrs. Sonia Gandhi announced the initiation of the process sought for so long

Much has happened since which has only further strengthened the case of Telangana and convinced the rest of the state that the forgone conclusion is one, which is not only just but also necessary.

Now, there are three elements at work attempting to avoid the inevitable.

First, there is the landed vested interest, which has “acquired” the lands of the Nizam’s sarf e khas (private estate), the Crown lands, Paigah properties and Wakf Board assets - all concentrated in Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts. Their fear is that Telangana with its inevitable and justifiable Muslim orientation will investigate all these “acquisitions” and recover these ill-gotten gains. This group is throwing its money around and hoping public opinion can be molded by it.

Second group is composed of the Delhi warriors – used to fighting battles from a safe distance. These think they can handle Telangana in the same way as they did Punjab and, as they still do, J&K and the Northeast. These geo-politicians have forgotten their geography!

Telangana is not in the periphery where such policies can be conducted without the rest of the country getting involved. It is in the Deccan - the heartland of the subcontinent. The north to south, east to west routes lie – as they always did through the Deccan and mostly through Telangana.

There is no way to hold Telangana and its 4 crores people against their will even with the Army. These armchair warriors have mobilized 50 battalions even when they are not sure of the Telangana police force and are busy raising walls around the Raj Bhavan.

Thirdly, there is High Command of the Congress Party. This, in the fading glory of a Delhi under siege, is working out the math - whether Telangana's 17 MPs will compensate for what is left over after Jagan takes his share in the rest of the state.

They are counting the numbers desperately and listening to the durbaris who say one thing now and another later depending on who speaks or pays them. Or what suits their masters. This math is confusing the decision maker and delay is the best recourse of the indecisive.

In all this, the reports (individual, collective and Intelligence Branch) - from the villages of Telangana are clear. The boys - young men, actually - are not prepared to commit suicide any longer. They are seething with passion and the managed news is only making them more angry and less sober.

They are currently verbally chastising their elected leaders and then will come of the turn of those who oppose the will of the people to face their wrath. They seem to think they need company and are thinking of taking along some others involuntarily.

Examples abound in the world beckoning emulation. Their tempers will give way and the flood will descend. Chaos will follow as Delhi dithers.

In Coastal Andhra, the feeling is of plain disgust and acceptance of the inevitable. They are more concerned about being able to sell their paddy at a remunerative price. If they are not wanted, they seem to say, so be it. They will go on their own and develop their towns and the devil takes the rest.

In Rayalaseema, there is a quiet desperation on selecting which way to go. Do they go with the Coastal crowd (which will swamp them) or strike out on their own - perhaps with the addition of Nellore and Ongole to make the state more viable? Right now they are hoping their golden boy Jaganmohan Reddy will show the way of their dilemma - and well he might.

Caught up in all this mess, what is the best way forward? Patience and more patience from Telangana? Open assertion by the Coastal Andhras of their confidence to make their own future regardless of the other two regions? Going for a development orientation rather than faction politics in Rayalaseema?

Violence is in the air. The verbal version is already in use - the physical one is round the corner. None of the politicians seem to realize they are playing with fire and do not have the wit or sense to see where their indecision and false hopes are leading.

They see and seek only their self-interest but risk losing all they have accumulated over the past. The suicides by Telangana young men have started - Yadi Reddi even going up to Delhi to try and wake those deaf leaders up to the voice of the Telangana people and to remind them of their promises. But the deaf don't hear and the young destroy their lives and devastate their families

In this situation the polity is without direction and risks collapse as it is pushed around by those who have most to lose and most to gain.

Already the senior leader of Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and legislator Payyavula Kesav Wednesday warned of suicide attacks in order to keep Andhra Pradesh united. In response, Congress MP Ponnampaluri Prabhakar called upon people not to commit suicides but kill those who are coming in the way of formation of a separate state.

*Desh ki fikar kar naadan, musibhat ane wali hai,
Barbadiyon ke mashpharay hain aasamano main*

Worry for the nation, you innocent, trouble is on its way
Premonitions of disaster are in the air

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