

Socio-Political Dynamics behind the Creation of Telangana State

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Andhra Pradesh (AP) has been witnessing intense movements and counter movements for the last few months centered on the creation of Telangana state. Though Telangana movement is continuing, in one form or the other, for almost more than 60 years from now, the present spell of the movement is unique in several aspects. The present movement should be studied in the backdrop of the changed political and social circumstances, media activism, a weak government in terms of its performance in the state coupled with a boom in the real estate that precede the Telangana movement. However credit goes to K.Chandrasekhararao (KCR), the TRS chief, for gathering momentum for this spell of the Telangana movement. The hunger strike undertaken by him in December has worked as catalyst in providing a common ground for all streams of ideologies that have geared up their demand for the creation of Telangana state. In deed it was a time when all political parties in Andhra Pradesh have locked up with two major issues: bifurcation of the state and categorization of SC reservation. Apart from these, the Congress high command was also facing an intense internal crisis in its own organization of the state unit in the form of a demand from the supporters of Jagan Mohan Reddy (Jagan), the only son of the late chief minister Y.S.Rajasekhareddy, to nominate him as the next chief minister of the state. Apart from the above the government in the state was also facing severe resistance from the public for the exorbitant increase of price of the daily necessities. In such a context the Congress party appears to have been convinced that a move in support of Telangana would serve several purposes including a check on its rival Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Thus the Congress leadership seems to have moved the cards meticulously with its midnight announcement on 9th December 2009 about Telangana. In view of the above conditions this article makes an attempt to examine the reasons behind the affirmative attitude of the Congress Party on 9th December, 2009.

For more than six decades the Telangana movement, in one form or the other, is continuing with varying levels of intensity at different points of time. Though there were several organizations that have been articulating the cause from a variety of ideological stand points, it was with the origin

of the TRS that the issue has been made alive and become regular stuff for the media and public particularly from the early part of 2000. TRS has declared that its main agenda was to achieve a separate state for Telangana and has chosen political power as a means to realize it. In the process it has contested all the elections in the state and seen several ups and downs, the latest being the 2009 electoral debacle. After its terrible setback in 2009 general elections its morale was so upset that it has not fielded a single candidate in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal elections with a fear of further humiliation. TRS cadres in the region were thoroughly frustrated. Chandrasekhararao himself has kept away from the media for some time and contemplated to resign to the headship of the party. In such a grim situation the culmination of a variety of factors including the free zone controversy unleashed afresh by the Supreme Court have helped TRS to revamp its image. The timely reaction of Chandrasekhararao in undertaking a hunger strike for Telangana has caught the attention of and boosted the already subsisted common aspiration for Telangana. The students of Telangana particularly the students of Osmania University should be accredited for the sustenance of the movement for they have literally made Chandrasekhararao to get back to hunger strike again after he ended his fast after a few days. After this move of the students the movement spread across the region like a wild fire. Cutting across all sections people got united and demanded all political leaders to resign so as to put pressure on the UPA government. The leadership of the movement was taken over by the students from the political leaders. No longer Chandrasekhararao is seen as the centre of the Telangana movement. The marches (padayatras) under taken by Gaddar the legendry ballad singer and other progressive activists, artists and writers have not faded away from the memories of the people of the region. Their call for a democratic Telangana has caught not only the attention of weaker sections of Telangana but also that of progressive non-Telangana individuals. Their continuous marches and meetings in the villages for Telangana has won support of the masses that has worked as a bedrock for the present spell of the movement. Unlike earlier the present Telangana movement, was preceded by a high rate of economic growth with an unprecedented real estate boom and a stronger bullish stock market. During this phase the state government has under taken a number of developmental projects that include a number of irrigation projects, popularly known as Jalayagnam projects.

It was also an open secret that majority of the government contracts went in favour of the capitalists of Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema which has infused a strong feeling left out among the contractors and political leaders of the Telangana region. They seem to have got convinced that unless there was a complete shift of political power from Andhra leaders, it would not be possible for them to compete Andhra capitalists. The real estate boom in and around Hyderabad has also appear to have left the capitalist class of Telangana region out as it was largely dominated by the Andhra-Seema capitalists. This has motivated them to take a strong stand in support of a separate state for Telangana. Finally, the judgment of the Apex court declaring Hyderabad as free zone has distressed

the youth of Telangana as it got potential implications in reducing their employment opportunities in the Hyderabad region. In fact this time, the free zone controversy has light the fire for a massive participation of the student community into the movement. Thus, with their active participation through protests, rallies, strikes, etc., the students emerged as the focal point of the entire Telangana movement. Their active leadership of has also encouraged the rural masses to jump into the movement. Thus the inequalities in the distribution of the augmented wealth among the richer sections on one hand and the increasing unemployment, poverty; and the raising prices of daily necessities on the other hand has culminated into a distress that took the form of Telangana movement. Thus the richer as well as the poorer sections have found their own reasons to identify themselves with the movement. In this context only issues like discrimination, backwardness, identity, unemployment, self respect etc., have come to hit the ground.

All these reasons have fermented into an unrest that gave a fresh lease of life to the demand for a separate state hood. With these events the congress leadership at Delhi was seem to have caught up in a situation where it could not escape from making a statement about Telangana. Congress also might have thought to convert the Telangana sentiment into a shot in its arm in wining the hearts of the people of that region. In the backdrop of the assurance given by all parties, except the CPM and Loksatta, to stand by its decision if made in support of Telangana has also given strength to the Congress party to make a statement on 9th December. Congress High command would not have dared to make a statement of this kind in the absence of the assurance offered by all parties.

A serious matter that has been suffocating the government and other political parties in the state for quite some time is the issue of categorization of SC reservation. Both the -Mala and Madiga caste organizations have been making claims and counter claims with regard to their respective populations and their representation in the public employment and educational opportunities. While the Madigas demand for a proportionate distribution of the 15% scheduled caste reservation among all the scheduled castes, most of the Mala organizations have opposed it on other grounds. Since the issue has become tricky with severe political implications, the government as well as the opposition parties have been playing it carefully. Now the Congress party seem to have consider the creation of Telangana state as an automatic solution even to this complex problem as it would accommodate majority of Malas into Andhra and Madigas into the Telangana states. Since around 70% of the AP Madiga population live in Telangana majority of them would confine to Telangana state and almost the same percentage of malas of the state would remain in Andhra. Their respective claims for more shares in opportunities based on their population in the state would stand irrelevant in the context of the bifurcation of the state. If this is the assumption of the Congress Party, it would hold strength and proved to be correct to an extent as the Mala and Madiga movements have become silent in the recent past particularly after the midnight announcement of the home minister. There is a possibility of further weakening of these movements if the Telangana state is created. The central leadership of the

Congress party which has thoroughly vexed with this issue, might be thinking to get rid of this long pending problem without directly tinkering with either of the castes but through a bifurcation of the state.

After the sudden demise of the former chief minister Y.S.RajasekharaReddy the congress leadership at Delhi has experienced an unprecedented pressure on it in the form of a demand from the supporters of Jaganmohanreddy(Jagan), the only son of RajasekharaReddy to make him the next chief minister of the state. Even before the completion of the last rites of RajasekharaReddy his loyalists aired demands in support of Jagan's candidature for the chief minister's post. Protests, signature campaigns, rallies and meetings have marked the emotionally charged atmosphere. In view of the sympathy and public support that RajasekharaReddy family enjoys in the state it was speculated that Jagan would become the next Chief Minister. With this prediction the state congress leaders, ministers and legislators have competed in rallying around Jagan to remain entered in his good books. Rumors made rounds about a possible split in the state Congress unit if Jagan was not made the chief minister. At some places posters of Sonia Gandhi were, allegedly tampered by the supporters of Jagan unable to bear her delay in the appointment of their leader. However there were also counter allegations to it that it was the work of opponents of Jagan to tarnish his image at Sonia Gandhi. However, it was a tuff time for the congress leadership at Delhi and this might have upset the congress high command about the future of congress in the state if it is left to depend on the charisma of a single political leader in a state. Meanwhile the industrialist –business men turned politicians have become a serious cause of suspicion for the national parties with a serious event from Karnataka state BJP unit. The amount of tension that the Gali JanardanaReddy episode exerted on the BJP at the national level seem to have cautioned the other national political parties, particularly the congress party. In view of this the national parties seem to have developed a suspicious attitude towards any strong political leader in states beyond a limit. No doubt, this view certainly holds strength in a federal political setup. In this context the heightened pressure in support of Jagan appear to have gone as challenge to the congress leadership at the centre. The leadership also might have thought that if Jagan was made the chief minister of AP it would be come a precedence and similar kind of pressures may crop up from other states as well. Therefore it has firmly turned down their demand. But what about the public support and sympathy Jagan enjoys? Doesn't it go against the Congress Party in case Jagan was not made the chief minister? Though temporarily, Sonia Gandhi's attitude towards Jagan has generated a lot of resentment in the public. Therefore the Congress at the centre was in a dire need of an other issue that could divert people of AP from Jagan. KCR's hunger strike came in hand as a relief for the central Congress's party. And some leaders of Congress party, from the Telangana region, who felt neglected by the late chief minister seem to have taken an opportunity to settle their scores. After 9th December statement of the Home minister the image of Jagan has been, allegedly, abused by a few Telangana leaders at Sonia

Gandhi. Before Jagan could take an open stand in support of the united Andhra he was projected as an enemy of the center's decision. By projecting Jagan as the major element of anti-establishment in the state they have benefited in three ways: One, by projecting Jagan as villain they have increased their access to the high command at Delhi. Two, they were able to regain their image in the public and Congress party that suffered a set back the YSR regime. Three, it helped to fix up Sonia Gandhi to the Chidambaram's statement of December 9th. The subsequent events have made - people believe that this kind of inverse relations with Jagan pushed Sonia Gandhi towards Congress leaders of Telangana. When there was lot of protest in the public against Sonia Gandhi, for she did not support Jagan, the senior Congress leaders of Telangana have taken a stand in support of Sonia Gandhi. In the backdrop of the Telangana movement when the Congress leaders were divided in to Telangana and United Andhra leaders the issue of Jagan has gone to the cold storage on its own. This was a great sigh of relief to the congress leadership at Delhi.

By taking a stand in support of Telangana the Congress party has succeeded in pushing its rival TDP also in to a corner. It has created such a suffocation to the TDP, that its chief Chandrababuniadu had literally become dumb on the issue and there was lot of criticism and pressure on him to take a stand. His diplomatic silence was dubbed by the leaders of other parties as shrewd opportunism. Though the leaders of his party were articulating the issue in that region it was primarily to make their presence felt in the movement. It was also alleged that both the acts – resignation of MLAs and hunger strikes by party cadres in the two reasons were at the instance of Chandrababu Naidu only.

But the December 9th statement of the Union Home minister pushed the TDP into more confusion and made the Congress leaders of the Telangana more energetic. If TRS dubs itself as a movement party for Telangana, Congress leaders of that region claimed that theirs' was the only party that could bring Telangana, since it was in power. But with the strategic silence of its chief the TDP and its leaders in Telangana region had faced severe embarrassment in public and at one point a serious rift in the party was also speculated. Thus the congress party at the centre might have considered that an affirmative statement towards Telangana would help it in overcoming several complex social and political issues with a single shot.

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