

## Talking with Telengana

Right now Andhra may claim to sit smack in the eye of Indian politics. Almost a re-run of anti-Mandal agitation that rocked the V P Singh regime in the '80s cannot be ruled out—as the people of Andhra are getting increasingly polarised along regional lines. Sonia Gandhi's Congress seems to have taken a calculated risk by conceding the demand of a separate Telengana state knowing full well that it would tempt dozens of regional outfits to have moral boost to justify smaller statehood demand. Creating more states, rather smaller states is no solution and yet they think it is the only way to pacify the ever growing middle class. The practice of cooption through reservation is just not enough to correct the inverted world in which the great majority live and work. Those who rule at the centre have nothing to lose if the map of India changes frequently, showing more and more states without rooting out the cause of boiling outrage. Despite so many regional outbursts every now and then, no political party is coming forward to demand a second states reorganisation committee to review the overall situation. The first one re-demarcated different state boundaries by over-ruling the British administrative legacy, mainly basing on linguistic and cultural identity. But the brown sahibs find it difficult to control popular anger within the existing states. The current agitation for separate statehood, barring one or two exceptions, like Gorkhaland and Kamtapur, don't really reflect separate linguistic and cultural aspirations.

India is not the only country where ethnic peculiarities and diversities fuel different shades of localised political passion all the time. The problem of ethnicity is global, no country, big or small, is free from ethnic unrest. But the crisis is more complex in Asian region. China has 56 distinct nationalities but Beijing has no major problem on hands in respect of ethnicity though islam-based insurgency is a recent phenomenon. For good reason or bad, China is dotted with numerous autonomous regions, of course, with municipal powers, in real terms, to assimilate ethnic identity into mainstream politics. Ex-facie autonomous units work fine. Only the other day the Chinese media publicised elaborately how its 56 nationalities celebrated together the 60th birth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (October 1, 1949). The rulers in New Delhi are yet to evolve a comprehensive strategic plan to tackle regionalism which in effect demands the share of exchequer. Regional parties—the Assam and Kashmir issues are different—are not really fighting for radical change in society. Middle class centric 'rationalism'—or irrationalism is trying to create a base with the sole objective of presenting their own yearly budget, all in the name of people.

The demand to carve out more states from the existing ones is likely to produce its anti-thesis—merger. Already, some people are voicing the demand of merger of failed (?) states for better administration. The expansion of bureaucracy and ruling apparatus has hardly improved the lot of tribals in Jharkhand. So Bihar's chief minister Nitish Kumar was quick enough to advocate the scheme of re-merger of Bihar with Jharkhand. In truth the idea of merger for better administration is as old as Indian republic. The political left in Bengal once

gained enormous popularity by opposing Nehruvian Congress Party's plan of Bengal-Bihar merger.

Communists in India may be nostalgic about their Telengana past. But that was a different Telengana symbolising people's struggle against feudal tyranny. Today the very feudals armed with computerised sophistication, are dominating Telengana politics. The communist left is nowhere in the picture. They simply do not know how to cope with ever growing regionalism under their orthodox marxist framework. They react to spontaneity and later justify the inevitable theoretically.

But Congress and the main opposition Party—Bharatiya Janata Party—look realistic enough to accept the fact that they can no longer keep their monopoly over Delhi sultanate without continually accommodating regional parties with ambition beyond regional boundary as they pose threat to the existing power structure.

One thing that remains bizarre in regional outbursts is the role the lords of finance play in fomenting and promoting regional politics. Big business houses do hardly oppose the idea of smaller states. It doesn't matter whether it is Andhra or Telengana, they can always deal with the ruling dispensation to their advantage. It is better for them to bargain with loose and weak power-brokers as it is happening in Jharkhand. They are on top everywhere, making record profits and inflating a new bubble.

Not in the distant future this regionalism is bound to fail as it is next to impossible to satisfy more and more middle-class people who work in the real economy. In that event right to secede will be the logical conclusion. The left has no agenda for that eventuality even in post-revolutionary society. At the time of writing Telengana was on the boil forcing the Congress to indulge in delaying tactic in granting statehood. 24.12.2009. □□□