

## **Party Politics, Naxalites and Telangana**

From the time of the merger of Telangana with Andhra, of the eleven Cabinets formed from 1956 to 1980, the Reddy contingent supplied an average of 26% of the total with the Brahmin (7%), Kammas (8%) and Kapus and other backward castes (28%). They also supplied 8 out of the 16 Chief Ministers. It is an odd but incontestable fact that a Kamma has never been a Congress Chief Minister in the state. That was to change with the advent of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which, in its turn, has had only Kamma Chief Ministers (father-in law and son-in-law duo) till date!

The TDP launched by N.T. Rama Rao swept into power in 1983 with a strong showing even in Telangana when the Congress won only 60 of the 294 seats in the Assembly. The TDP did surprisingly well in Telangana. Ajai Sahni, the well-informed national security analyst, felt the spectacular victory had also something to do with the Naxalites and their strength in Telangana as:

“... NTR found it expedient to secure their support during the elections the following year, and succeeded in unseating the Congress-I government in the State. In the years that followed, his government gave the PWG a free hand to consolidate their activities”.

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) victory in 1983 and again in 1985 – with massive majorities in Telangana - broke the Reddy dominance and ensured ten odd years of TDP rule. But the Telangana cause suffered nonetheless. As the SKC says: “The rise and subsequent long rule of Telugu Desam Party, led/dominated by the Kammas of Coastal Andhra, further consolidated Telugu identity, while successfully suppressing the demand for a separate Telangana state”.

But what one party can do another can imitate. Ajai Sahni comments:

“This time, it was the Congress-I Party, under the leadership of Dr. Marri Chenna Reddy, that recognized the 'patriotic' potential of the Naxalites, and sought and secured their support in the elections of 1989. ...Chenna Reddy lifted the ban on the PWG in December 1989, and released 190 hardcore Naxalites lodged in jail, giving them unprecedented freedom of political and criminal action. ”

According to Sahni:

“Chenna Reddy's policy was reversed by his successor, N. Janardhan Reddy towards the latter half of 1991, after the murder of a former Minister, Hayagreeva Chary, in Warangal, and a rising flood of violence, large scale extortion, arson and destruction of private and public properties. In May 1992, the ban on the activities of the PWG and its front organisations was re-imposed. The impact was palpable, with killings and other offences declining immediately and continuously till 1994, when N.T. Rama Rao was returned to power. NTR lifted the ban and the old policies of conciliation and complicity gave the Naxalites another opportunity to revive, strengthen and extend the scale and geographical scope of their activities.

The period of Telangana agitation (1968-74) total deaths in extremist action averaged 40 a year and fell to half that in the period 1975-82. The real pick up comes with the Telugu Desam period (1983-89) with the 83 deaths a year (4 times as in the previous period) rising to 323 a year - almost one death a day - during the Congress regime (1990-94). This level continues during the TDP period (1995-2004) and peters out during the Y.S.Rajasekhra Reddy (YSR) Congress regime. During the entire 44-year period (of the 55 years of Andhra Pradesh's existence) Telangana suffered one death every two days from Left wing violence and counter violence !

### **Casualties in Left Wing Extremist Violence in AP**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Civilian</b>	<b>Security Forces</b>	<b>Extremist</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Annual Average (of Total)</b>
1968-74	118	5	156	279	40
1975-82	113	2	53	168	21
1983-89	334	52	194	580	83
1990-94	828	168	620	1616	323
1995-04	1221	286	1479	2986	299
2005-11	231	33	398	672	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>2887</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>2943</b>	<b>6389</b>	<b>145</b>

Source: [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/andhra/data\\_sheets/annual\\_casualties.aspu](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/andhra/data_sheets/annual_casualties.aspu)

The Chandrababu Naidu Government revived the ban on Naxalite organisations, and has reverted to the policy of confronting extremist violence with the force of arms but he also tried to grab the electoral weapon by lifting the ban on the Naxalite in 2002 in order to facilitate peace talks, which did not produce results. By now it was clear that the Telangana Naxalites were an electoral force to be used and discarded by the two main parties –whatever the impact on lives of Telangana people and the development of the region.

The entry of Y.S. Rajasekhra Reddy (YSR), who became Leader of the Opposition in 1999, altered the strategy of the Congress Party. His approach included two tactics, which succeeded in seizing power from the TDP.

The first was the alliance with the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001. This gave the Congress Party support in Telangana in the 2004 election by making a manifesto promise of Telangana statehood. This worked to undermine the TDP base in the region as it opposed Telangana statehood.

The second move was to bring the Naxalites into the picture and the Congress-TRS combination sailed through.

As Ajay Mehra comments:

“Y. S. Rajasekhra Reddy led Congress Government in the State too began peace talks on 15 October 2004, a few months after it took over. ...The PWG leadership not only came over ground, the organization began regrouping spanned out to other States and

regions obviously on a recruitment mission, issued tough statements as a prelude to the talks as a psychological warfare virtually continued with their activities”

But between 2004 and 2009, as seen in the table, YSR Government moved hard against the Naxalites and virtually eliminated them as a force – completing the same efforts in the TDP period. The Naxalites ceased to exist as a physical and political force - and no longer available to keep the Telangana elite chained to the Coastal and Rayalaseema leadership in both parties.

The 2009 election saw almost all political parties (including the now chastened TDP) promising statehood for Telangana. The Congress saw a reduction in its prospects but managed to retain power. With the death of YSR and under the guidance of the Congress High Command, the political parties in the state agreed to a separate Telangana on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2009 and the Union Government concurred formally on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 and announced its decision to both Houses of Parliament. After protests from Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions this was followed by an attempt to divert the process by appointing the Sri Krishna Committee.

In the entire is period – 2001 to 2009 - the Congress, TRS, TDP thought the Telangana movement could and would be turned on and off like a tap at their will. With the vast number of youths – estimated close to 600 – committing ritual suicide for the Telangana cause, and the mobilization by the Joint Action Committee both in urban and rural areas the movement solidified. It had become a mass movement, which had serious implication to the political architecture of the region and State. Telangana will no longer be available as a “vote bank” for the Andhra and Rayalaseema leaders to play around in their drive for power.

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