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The role of students in the Telangana Movement – A historical study

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ABSTRACT

The student movement in Separate Telangana movement launched by the student organizations in the state is by far one of the most powerful movements ever considered to have been launched in the state. Demand for Telangana State was relegated back seat till 1995 and again initiated discussions, workshops, seminars and public meetings by intellectuals in Kakatiya University, Osmania University Students are actually the backbones of the Telangana movement. Besides TRSV several other student wings like ABVP, NSUI, PDSU, AISF, and Dalith Student Organization, etc. also supported the cause of the Telangana movement. Most of the student organizations assembled in the Kakatiya University on the 17th of November 2009 and formed a student JAC and 23rd invited this JAC by the supreme of TRS, KCR, and supported him if he were gone for a hunger strike. Actually, he was already declared his hunger strike. Students are actively involved in the movement because they are aware of the cause since their childhood days.

Keywords— *Telangana Movement, Students, JAC, All Parties, TRS, Congress, BJP, Students unions*

1. INTRODUCTION

Student movement in Separate Telangana movement launched by the student organizations in the state is by far one of the most powerful movements ever considered to have been launched in the state. After the formation of Andhra Pradesh approximately twelve years, Telangana people had expressed dissatisfaction towards the gentleman and guarantees were implemented. The 1969 agitation was started by the students followed by government employees. Its roots could be seen years back in the history of free India. The first manifestation was non-Mulki agitation of 1952 followed by the second non-Mulki agitation 1956. The agitation of 1969 was yet another upsurge in this continuum and may be the series.

In-fact, the Telangana Movement of 1969, actually commenced on 6th December 1968. Students took out a procession from Vivek Vardhini College in Hyderabad. The procession was attacked by rowdies; recruited by so-called integrationists as well as ...the police. Soon demonstrations were organized in Khammam and Warangal, which later spread to Nizamabad and other parts of Telangana enber first as Black Day.

An insignificant event in 1969 acted as a trigger for a massive student uprising in Nizam Telangana. On January 8, 1969, a student named Ravindranath started an indefinite hunger strike in Khammam demanding protection for Telangana. It is unclear what motivated him, but this was mostly a localized protest. Five days into the strike, students in Khammam ransacked some government offices and burned the road transportation corporation (RTC) buses. Students in Warangal also organized protests in solidarity with their fellow students in Khammam.

On January 12, 1968, the Osmania University Student Union held an extraordinary meeting to assess the situation in the districts where students were protesting. The union expressed its profound dissatisfaction with the political leadership from the region and demanded the resignation of MLAs and nine cabinet ministers from the Telangana region.

The students announced that, unless the government met these demands, they intended to go on an indefinite strike starting January 15, 1969. The student demands went up in number and size when compared to the original demands of the all-party Telangana leaders.

As announced, students across the twin cities boycotted classes on January 15, 1969. They headed to the Nizam College grounds for a meeting. Two groups emerged among the students: one group demanded protections for Telangana whereas another group demanded a separate state for Telangana. The Student Union, under Mallikarjun's leadership, resolved to continue their agitation and-boycott the classes. Mallikarjun urged all the students to come to the Nizam College' grounds for a meeting on the following day at 11 a.m. During the debate, the group demanding a separate Telangana state clearly had an upper hand. After the meeting was over, President of the Osmania University Students Association Mallikarjun led a student rally from the Nizam college grounds to the Abids Circle. Despite heavy police security, there were stray incidents of students throwing stones at city buses. Twenty-five-year-old Sriram Chandar and ten-year-old Dasthagir died in police firing when they gate crashed into a felicitation ceremony organized for the home minister Jalagam Vengal Rao in his native district of Khammam. In another incident in Secunderabad, an eighteen-year-old Ravinder was killed when the satyagraha movement got out of control.

However, Osmania University Student Union leader Mallikarjun announced that their strike would continue until a separate Telangana state was achieved. At this point, it was an open secret that politicians from behind the scenes were managing the student union leaders. The CM, Sri. Brahmananda Reddy, exasperated with the ever-growing list of demands and unabated violence, announced the closure of all educational institutions until January 27, 1969.

As a result of the High Court decision the students of Khammam district started an agitation for the implementation of the 2:1 ratio in all public, services including autonomous bodies like the State Electricity Board. They also demanded the extension of the duration of the safeguards discuss the problem of Telangana in the light of the High Court Judgment, But the politicians of the region did not respond favorably to the problems raised by the student leaders and did not take their demands seriously. Following this a General Body meeting of Osmania University Students Union was convened on January 12th at 10 a.m. in the premises of Nizam College to discuss the issue of Telangana safeguards. To this meeting many of the prominent student leaders were also invited for discussion. At this meeting two different views emerged on favouring a separate state and the other opting for an integrated Andhra Pradesh with effective implementation of safeguards. In one section demanding a separate state and the other opting for an integrated Andhra Pradesh with effective implementation of safeguards for the people of Telangana from then onwards, one could see the students working as two different groups.

The one section demand for effective implementation of safeguards were popularly known as "safeguards" and the other who determined to accept nothing less than a separate state of Telangana were called separatists. The safeguardists have decided to fight under the Osmania University Student Organization banner and the 'separatists' decided to work under the organization of Telangana Students. The Action Committee which became popular in the Telangana area. These two groups. Organized meetings separately and started demonstrations from 15th January 1969 onwards which led to a confrontation between the rival groups on 18 January, 1969.

2. SECOND PHASE OF TELANGANA MOVEMENT-1990-2009

Around 1991 two organizations, Telangana Student Front and Telangana Liberation Student Organization were launched in Osmania University. In 1992 the Kakatiya Unit of Telangana Students Front was formed. A national seminar on small states was organized at Osmania University in August 1993. Surendra Mohan inaugurated the conference and Justice Madav Reddy addressed the gathering. Delegates from various parts of the country attended the conference.

Forum for Freedom of Expression - a group of Journalists and Writers, the author of this article was one of its founders, also organized a daylong conference in Hyderabad in 1996. Stirrings of a new movement could be clearly witnessed in Warangal on 1st November 1996 at the Telangana Praja Samiti convention attended by more than five thousand delegates from all parts of Telangana. The Hyderabad convention was held on 1st December, 1996 and after that a series of conferences, group and public meetings have been held at Godavari Khani, Karimnagar, Siddipet, Jangabn, Aler, Ghanapur, Nizamabad, Khammam, Nalgonda, the old city of Hyderabad and Bhongir. The Bhongir meeting proved to be a turning point. The chief guest was Gaddar, renowned -revolutionary balladeer of the region.' He called upon the people to launch a totally peaceful agitation for achievement of a separate state.

The Demand for Telangana Statehood has been on agenda of the intellectuals, employees and student youth, even after the suppression of 1969 movement, in view of the unabated discrimination, injustice and humiliations inflicted on Telangana people and employees. The demand for statehood continued till 1996 and after. Organizations, forums have been formed to lead the movement for Telangana state again during the late nineties of 20th century. Telangana Mahasabha, Telangana Janasabha, Telangana Students Organizations, Telangana Teachers Forum, Telangana Intellectuals Forum, Telangana Information Centre, Telangana Study Forum have been formed to take up the issue of Telangana statehood. The formation of these organizations was preceded by unabated irregularities against the interest of Telangana people. They include Gentlemen agreement and violation of six point formula, utilization of irrigational water of Godavari and Krishna rivers, allocation of budgetary reserves, and establishment of universities, colleges and primary education so and so forth. With this background during 1980's and 1990's particularly of Telugu Desam Party rule, the demand for separate Telangana picked up again, paved the way for the birth of Telangana Rastra Samithi (TRS) in 2001.

The Telangana Vidyavanthula Vedika (2006), Telangana Ikya Karyacharana Committee (2006), Telangana Dhoom Dham (2007) and Cultural Groups have been formed. With the emergence of these organizations the people's movement has picked up to the heaps and abounds, irrespective of political lobbies or parties. The political Joint Action Committee (2010) consisting of TRS, BJP and CPI(ML) and other organizations is formed as a consequence of withdrawal of Telangana formation process declaration by the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram.

The aspirations of the people for self - rule of Telangana state has been gaining movement year after year, particularly after 2001 the demand for Telangana state-is based on both physical development of social groups and self - respect of the people in the region. In spite of all the evasive promises, suppressive and repressive measures and conspiracies manipulated by the both National and Regional parties to fade out Telangana movement, there is a growing movement under accelerating pressure over both Central and State Governments. While Telangana people have been agitating for separate State the political parties are taking advantage of the situation for electoral gains during General and local body elections. Immediately after electoral gains are achieved, the ruling parties have been trying to deceive the people, by changing their stand.

Demand for Telangana State was relegated back seat till 1995 and again initiated discussions, workshops, seminars and public meetings by intellectuals in Kakatiya University, Osmania University and leftist outfits state BJP also included the state formation in its 1999 "election agenda, but it formed (Chathisgarh, Urtaranchal and Jharkand) in 2000. By June 2001, again the Telangana State formation issue could be promoted a new political outfit i.e. TRS led by Mr. K. Chandrasekar Rao, who has resigned for his MLA candidate (T.D.P).

3. THIRD PHASE 2009-2014

According to activists, from 2010-12. Over 300 young-people killed themselves - sixteen by self-immolation - demanding more political control for the locals of Telangana. According to Telangana Amaraveerula Kutumbala Vedika (Telangana Martyrs Families' Forum) directory there have been 904 suicides in Andhra Pradesh from November 2009 to February 2013 demanding Telangana.

The Telangana movement is the Indian struggle for economic and cultural autonomy. Like many other social -political movements, Telangana movement was also started at Osmania University, where the process of mass education brought many The Telangana movement is the first people together. It became center stage for Telangana Students Front (TSF) and Telangana Liberation Students Organization (TELSO) organized demonstrations on and outside the campus.

4. FORMATION OF TELANGANA JOINT ACTION COMMITTEE (TJAC/JAC)

The TRS reacted by calling for another general strike on 24 December 2009 which was aimed at stalling the regional economy. A Joint Action Committee (JAC) was formed with the pro-separation members of the major political parties. There were reports that members of the JAC had widely divergent approaches on the issue of a separate Telangana.

4.1 Students Joint Action Committee

Students of Osmania, Kakatiya, Telangana, Palmur and Nallagonda (MG) Universities organized padayatras in Telangana. Students JAC divided in two teams and took the padayatras separately in South and North Telangana regions respectively. 'The' concluding meetings held' in Kakatiya University campus and Osmania University Campus •respectively. The peoples and their representatives in the respective districts extended their fullest cooperation in making the padayatras a great-success irrespective of their political ideology.

Students are actually the backbone of the Telangana movement. Besides TRSV several other student wings like ABVP, NSUI, PDSU, AISF and Dalith Student Organization etc. also supported for the cause of Telangana movement. Most of the students organizations assembled in the Kakatiya University on the 17th of November 2009 and formed a student JAC and 23rd invited this JAC by the supreme of TRS, KCR and supported him if he were gone for a hunger strike. Actually, he was already declared his hunger strike. Students are actively involved in the movement because they are aware of the cause since their childhood days. At the time of emergence of TRS in 2001 now the students of university are in their school education. They have strong impact of TRS in their minds. Ofcourse whenever there is a dilemma in the path of the agitation they have corrected by showing correct line of approach.

Students have organized several activities in Telangana region. At the time hunger strike these students particularly from Osmania University went for dharnas, rasta rokhos, public meetings and other agitation activities in a democratic way but the police have retaliated it strongly through the means of violence in which hundreds of students injured. The campus was caped with the police/military force and blocked entire campus with barbed wire and also stopped water, power supply to the hostels of the university. They have also faced firing, laticharge in the campus. The government declared holidays to the students and compelled the students to leave their campuses. It is in this situation that a student by name Srikantha Chary of physiotherapy student gone to the extent of committing suicide for the cause of the agitation. In these two incidents the students who committed suicides gave slogans of "Jai Telangana" and these two indents paved way for more than. 600 suicides by the students in several parts of the Telangana.

However, the Telangana Movement in the second phase was initiated by intellectual like professors, lowers and employees, cultural and literary activists, caste organizations spreading across caste, religions and special dimensions. It has become mass movement including rural and inertial places unlike the earlier phase restricting to mostly urban areas. The movement is sustaining for longer period more than two decades in the second phase.

In the ongoing movement many women are also participating and being arrested by the state government for separate Telangana state. Especially the police targeted Osmania and Kakatiya Universities students not only boys but also girls. Even now Osmania University is like a battle filed with continuous attacks and lati charges.

The OU was forced to shut down its hostels after a joint action committee was formed by students from across the two dozen hostels. Some students have even changed their vehicle registration numbers to TG (Telangana) from AP. The enthusiasm of the students has breathed life into defunct pro-Telangana employees' unions in various government departments. While the students have brought the Telangana issue back, it has also provided fillip to the TRS which is in a shambles.

In 2009, the police attacked cruelly the OU JAC which was formed by the all students unions of Osmania University. On 14th February 2010, the police attacked the Osmania students very cruelly in the guidance of Stephen Ravindra. They broke all the lights of Arts College with stones and made the hostels students live in darkness. This is the most cruel attack which was done by the police. In 14th February attack at least 30 students were wounded and hospitalized. In these 6 girls were wounded very much. The Human Rights Commission protested there attacks.

On 21st February 2011, 16 Girls from Osmania, Kakatiya and Mahatma Gandhi Universities broken all the barriers of the police in every sheet and succeed to reach the assembly on the programme (Assembly Muttadi).

The police arrested the 16 girls in front of the Assembly. In the Millian March Programme, the police arrested all years old girl, Keerthi, a student from Khammam and put in custody for 14 days. After her release she actively participated in the movement with her songs and dance. MLAs and ministers from Telangana submitted their resignations demanding immediate steps to initiate the process of bifurcating Andhra Pradesh. Pro-Telangana protestors & Osmania University students attacked then Telugu Desam Party leader Nagam Janardhan Reddy, pushed him down, kicked and rained blows on him till he escaped on a bike.

4.2 Students in Telangana Agitation

The historic Telangana agitation has established strong traditions of student political activism and radicalism a tradition that came back with a vengeance as evidenced in the seventies and after. In the case of separate Telangana agitation, it is significant to note that it all started essentially as a student protest not for a separate state of Telangana but against the failure of the government to implement the safeguards particularly those relating to the employment and educational opportunities as enumerated in the Gentleman's Agreement concluded at the time of merger in 1956. The agitation itself was started without any political party or responsible politician providing the leadership, In fact, the politicians belonging to this region, particularly those of the Congress including legislators and ministers were forced to join the agitation at a later stage.

This agitation has been one of the most militant and protracted agitations which mainly involved the students of Osmania University with the entire educational system including schools coming to a grinding halt for a long time and with the agitation resulting in a heavy toll of student casualties.²⁸ As many as 370 Students have lost their lives. The agitation once again helped in further strengthening the linkages that existed between the teachers and students. In this context it may be pertinent to recall that all through the agitation not only the students and teachers made a common cause but also one former Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Ravada Satyanarayana and Mr. Narotham Reddy, the then Vice-Chancellor, openly supported the agitation and even offered satyagraha in the campus erected by the students.²⁹ The agitation after it fizzled out in as much as it failed to achieve its ultimate object of separate statehood of Telangana, also exposed to the students their alterability for the disgruntled and self-seeking politicians to exploit them for selfish and partisan and partisan ends a feeling of betrayal that lingers in the minds of the student community even to date. In any case, the agitation left an indelible impression on the student community for the ensuing decades in as much as it renewed the pride and sense of identification of the people of Telangana with Osmania University and all events, inside and outside, having a bearing on the status of this University, however, remotely, came to be delicately equated with the very status of this region in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Thus, matters ranging from state/grants to the University, admissions, appointments to the faculty and administrative positions, etc., have been consequently acquiring a new, and not insignificant, dimensions in the minds of the people of this region.

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